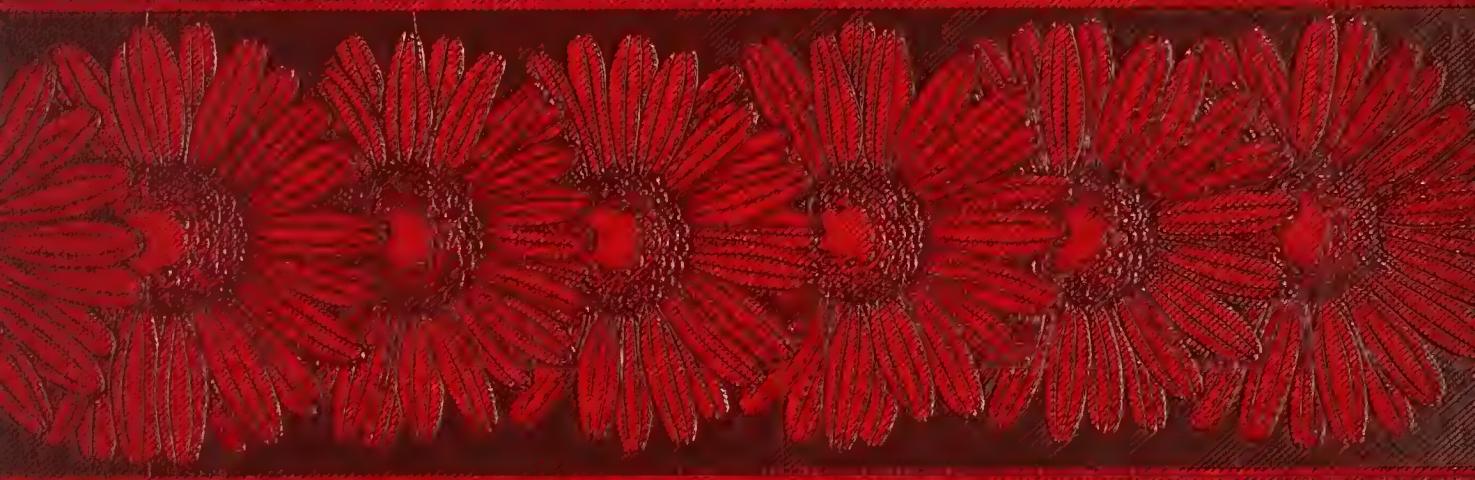


NEW-YEAR'S
BARGAIN



BY

SUSAN COOLIDGE

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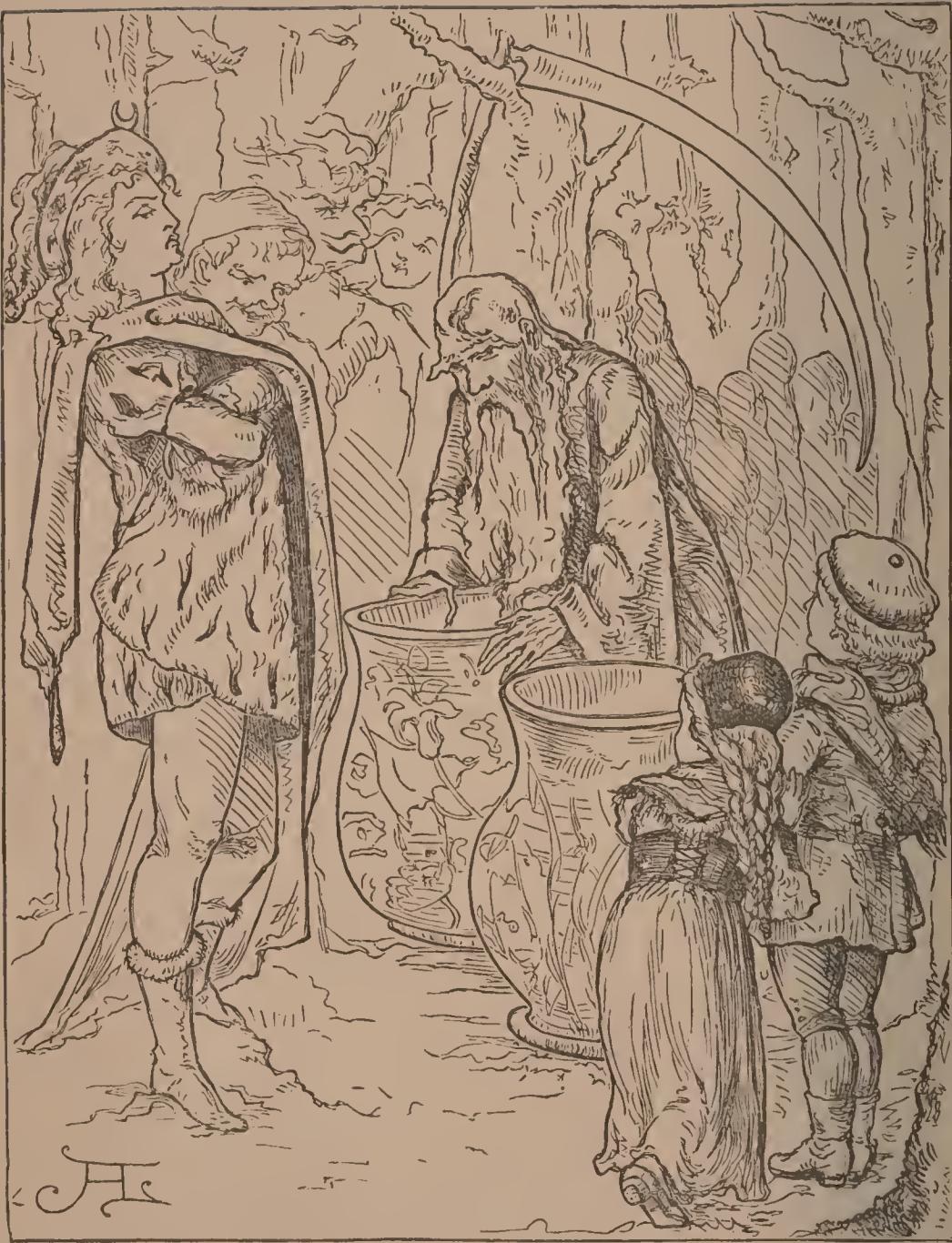
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

THE NEW-YEAR'S BARGAIN.



"There was only one body there,—an old, old man with snow-white hair; but there was a long row of clay figures in front of him."

THE

NEW-YEAR'S BARGAIN.

BY

SUSAN COOLIDGE.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY ADDIE LEDYARD.

Sarah C. Hooley,



BOSTON:
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY.

1898.

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Susan C. Mowbray,
a.t.p.

A LITTLE golden head close to my knee,
Sweet eyes of tender, gentianella blue
Fixed upon mine, a little coaxing voice,—

Only we two.

“ Tell it again ! ” Insatiate demand !
And like a toiling spider where I sat,
I wove and spun the many-colored webs
Of this and that.

Of Dotty Pringle sweeping out her hall ;
Of Greedy Bear ; of Santa Claus the good ;
And how the little children met the Months
Within the wood.

“ Tell it again ! ” and though the sand-man came,
Dropping his drowsy grains in each blue eye,
“ Tell it again ! oh, just once more ! ” was still
The sleepy cry.

My spring-time violet ! early snatched away
To fairer gardens all unknown to me,—
Gardens of whose invisible, guarded gates
I have no key, —

I weave my fancies now for other ears, —
Thy sister-blossom's, who beside me sits,
Rosy, imperative, and quick to mark
 My lagging wits.

But still the stories bear thy name, are thine,
Part of the sunshine of thy brief, sweet day,
Though in *her* little warm and living hands
 This book I lay.

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"This afternoon, in spite of the cold, they are out gathering wood."

CHAPTER I.

THE BARGAIN WITH THE MONTHS.

IT is a cold, wintry day. The Old Year is going to die to-night. All the winds have come to his funeral, and, while waiting, are sky-larking about the country. It is a very improper thing for mourners to do. Here they are in the Black Forest, going on like a parcel of school-boys,

waltzing with leaves, singing in tree-tops, whooping, whistling, making all sorts of odd noises. If the Old Year hears them, he must think he has a very queer sort of "procession."

Max and Thekla are used to the winds, and not afraid of them. They are not afraid of the Forest either, though the country people avoid it, and tell wonderful stories about things seen and heard there. The hut in which they and their Grandfather live is in the heart of the wood. No other house stands within miles of them. In summer-time the wild lilies grow close to the door-step, and the fawns creep shyly out to drink at the spring near by; and sometimes, when the wind blows hard on winter nights, strange barkings can be heard in the distance, and they know that the wolves are out. They do not tremble, though they are but children. Max is eleven, very stout and strong for his age, and able to chop and mark the wood for Grandfather, who for many years has been Woodman. Thekla, who is nine, keeps the house in order, cooks, mends

clothes, and knits stockings like a little house-fairy. All their lives they have lived here, and the lonely place is dear to them. The squirrels in the wood are not more free and fearless than these children, and they are so busy and healthy that the days fly fast.

This afternoon, in spite of the cold, they are out gathering wood, of which the Ranger allows them all they need to use. There is a pile at home already, almost as high as the cottage roof: but Thekla is resolved that her fire shall always be bright when Max and the Grandfather come in from out-doors, blue and cold; and she isn't satisfied yet. For hours they have been at work, and have tied ever so many fagots. The merry winds have been helping in the task, tearing boughs and twigs off overhead, and throwing them down upon the path, so that the bundles have collected rapidly, and wise little Thekla says, "This has been a good day."

"I 'm getting tired, though," she goes on. "Let 's rest awhile, and take a walk. We never

came so far as this before, did we? I want to go up that pretty path, and see where it comes out. Don't you think we have got wood enough, Max?"

Yes, Max thought they had. So hand in hand the children went along the path. Every thing was new and strange. Into this part of the forest they had never wandered before. The trees were thick. Bushes grew below. Only the little foot-track broke the way. Thekla crept closer to her brother as the walk grew wilder. A great forest is an awful sort of place; most of all in winter, when the birds and squirrels are hushed and the trees can be heard talking to one another. Sweet, curious smells come from you know not where. The wind roars, and the boughs creak back sharply as if the giants and dwarfs were quarrelling. All is strange and wonderful.

And now the bushes grow thinner. They were coming upon a little open space fringed about with trees, and suddenly Thekla exclaimed, in an astonished voice,—

"Why, Max! Look! There are people in there. I can see them through the bushes!"

"People?" cried Max. "Stealing wood, no doubt. Quiet, Thekla! don't make any noise: we'll creep up, and catch them at it. They shall see what the Ranger says to such doings."

So, like mice, they crept forward, and peeped through the screen of boughs. But there was no sound of chopping, and nobody was meddling with the wood. In fact, there was only one body visible,—an old, old man with snow-white hair. But there was a long row of clay figures in front of him, men and women as large as life; and they looked so natural, it was no wonder Thekla had made the mistake. Some were half-finished; some but just begun: one only seemed perfect,—the figure of a beautiful youth, with a crescent moon on his cap; and, even as they looked, the old man took a pinch of something, moulded it with his hand, and stuck it on the side of the head, from which it hung like a graceful plume.

Then he seemed satisfied, and began to work on one of the others.

"How lovely! but did you ever see any thing so queer?" whispered Thekla. "If we only dared go nearer!"

"Dared!" cried Max: "this is *our* wood, and we have a right to go where we like in it. Come on!" and he took Thekla's hand, and drew her boldly forward.

There were two great jars standing there, which seemed to hold the stuff out of which the figures were made. The children peeped in. One was full of a marvellous kind of water, sparkling and golden and bubbling like wine. The other held sand, or what seemed like sand,—fine, glittering particles,—most beautiful to see. It was wonderful to watch the old man work. His lean fingers would twist and mould the sand and water for a second, and there would be a lovely head, an arm, or a garland of flowers. The forms grew like magic; and the children were so charmed with watch-

ing, that they forgot either to speak or to go away.

At last, the old man turned, and saw them. He didn't smile, nor did he seem angry. He only stood, and fixed his eyes upon them in silence. Thekla began to tremble, but Max bravely addressed him :—

"What curious work this is you are doing!" he said. "Is it very hard?"

"I'm used to it," was the brief reply.

"You have been doing it a long time perhaps," said Thekla, shyly.

"Seven thousand years or so," answered the old man.

"Why, what a story!" cried Max. "That's impossible, you know: the world wasn't made as long ago as that."

"Oh, yes! it was. You were not there at the time, and I was. I got there about as soon as *it* did, or a little before."

"He's certainly crazy," whispered Thekla: "let's run away."

"Run away," replied her brother, "from that old fellow? Why, he's ten times as old as Grandfather, and I'll bet he's not one quarter so strong. There's something very queer about it all, though, and I'm bound to find it out. Would you dislike to tell us your name, sir?" he asked politely.

"Oh, no!" answered the old man: "I haven't the least objection. Most people, however, don't remember to inquire till they're about seeing the last of me. They mistake me for my brother, Eternity, I suppose. My name is Old Time. That's my scythe hanging on the tree. Don't you see it?"

There it was sure enough, only they had not noticed it before. "And what are these beautiful figures?" asked little Thekla.

"Those are the Months," replied Time. "I come here every year to renew them. They get quite worn out, and need building up. It's a nice dry place, and they can stand till they are wanted. This one is January. He's finished;

but I 'm a little behind hand with the others." As he spoke, he turned again to his task.

"And what is this stuff you are making them of?" inquired Max, dipping his finger in the sparkling liquid.

The old man fixed upon him a fiery eye. "Don't meddle with that, boy!" said he, in a severe tone: "nobody can touch those drops safely but myself. That is water from the stream of Time."

"And these?" asked Thekla, pointing to the second jar.

"Those are what you know as 'moments,'" was the reply. "They are really the dust of dead years, though somebody or other has given them the name of 'sands of Time.' Pretty things they are, bu. they won't keep. Everybody in the world can have one at a time, but nobody can lay up a stock for next day. I 'm the only person to whom that is allowed."

Just then a naughty idea entered into Max's head. "We 'll see whether that is true," he mut-

tered; and, watching till the old man's back was turned, he plunged his fingers into the jar, stole a double handful of the sand, and hid it in the tin can which was slung to his side, and in which his dinner and Thekla's had been. Old Time was too busy to heed him. Pretty soon after, Max took Thekla's hand, and, without saying "Good-by," dragged her away down the narrow path towards home. It was almost nightfall when at last they got there.

It was not till after supper when Grandfather had gone to bed that Max confessed what he had done. Thekla felt dreadfully about it; but he wouldn't say he was sorry, and was sitting by the fire letting the shining particles drift through his fingers, when suddenly voices were heard out of doors as if a large company was approaching. He had just time to hurry the can into a safe hiding-place when the latch rattled, the door flew open, and in long procession streamed in the very figures they had seen that afternoon in the wood.

No longer lifeless however, but angry, noisy, reproachful. "Ah, little thief!" cried January. "Where are the stolen moments?"

"Yes," shouted March, a blustering fellow with wild hair and eyes. "Where's the third finger of my left hand? Where are my Brother February's thumb-nail and right ear-tip?"

"And my roses," wept June, a fair young woman. "See, I ought to have a whole lap full, and there are only five. Oh, naughty, naughty boy!"

"And my holly sprig?" vociferated December. "Who's to know which I am without it? Not a child in the world will hang up his stocking at the right time."

"Didn't you know," sobbed April, "that the jar only held just enough to make us complete, and no more? And here all of us but January are ugly, maimed creatures, and the New Year will be so disgusted with us."

It was too true. Every one lacked something. September had no wheat-ears. May mourned

over her want of violets. November raged up and down, declaring that he *must* have a turkey. "And what do you think," grumbled March, "the world is going to say, when we all come in docked after this ridiculous fashion? The tides will be wrong and the almanac-makers will tear their hair. The moon will go wandering about like a lunatic. And all because a little boy in the Black Forest couldn't keep his hands out of what didn't belong to him. Oh, fie! fie! wait till my turn comes! won't I blow you about!"

And the Months clustered about poor Max, scolding, threatening, crying, till he didn't know which way to look. He began to feel dreadfully ashamed of himself, especially as Thekla was sobbing as loudly as April, and imploring him to make amends. But he kept up a bold front.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I think you're very unreasonable. Time belongs to us all. I never had so much to myself before, and I mean to keep it unless you make it worth my while to give it up."

"What shall we do?" cried July. "Shall we all make you a present? or tell you a story?" said November.

"Or sing you a song?" chanted May.

"No music, thank you," answered Max. "Little Thekla here sings to me, and that is sweet enough. But if you each will make us a gift, and each tell us a story, I will restore the sand you are making such a fuss about. What do you say? Is it a bargain?"

"I won't," said January. "I'll have nothing to do with it: I am finished, and have no favors to ask of anybody."

The others, however, all cried, "Yes!" And so the bargain was struck. Each Month was to come in turn on the last night of the month before, tell a story, bring a present, and get his missing moments. With this agreement, they said good-by. April gave Thekla a kiss, and they went away. For a time their voices could be heard growing more and more distant in the forest, then all was silent again.

"Isn't that splendid?" cried Max, exultingly.

"It's very nice about the presents and stories," answered Thekla; "but I can't help wishing you hadn't taken the moments, Max. It's dreadful to think of your stealing any thing."

"Pooh!" said Max: "it isn't stealing to take *time*. Everybody does that."



"Where are the stolen moments?"

CHAPTER II.

THE BEAR STORY.

IT seemed a long month to Max and Thekla, but at last it was over. The 31st of January came. Grandfather was tucked up early in bed, the fire was poked, the tin can brought out, and all made ready. The children sat in expectation. At last there came a rap at the door.

“Walk in,” cried Max; and February entered. He was a short, thick-set fellow, with red eyes, a red nose, and a gruff, surly voice. Very unhappy he looked just now; and when Max pulled up a chair for him, he sat down on the edge, and began,—

“Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking,—

“Hallo!” cried Max, interrupting him. “That’ll

never do in the world. That's a horrid beginning: you must try again."



"The brothers and sister believed every word of it; but Mamma put her tongue in her cheek, and gently pointed over her left shoulder with her paw."

"Oh, must I?" said February, much relieved. "I thought I had to take pains with my language. People who 'address the young' usually do. Well, if I may go ahead in my own way it's all right: you've taken a weight off my mind."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Max; "but before you begin, where's the gift?"

"Here," said February; and he pulled from his pocket something that looked like a big icicle. It *was* an icicle, only it didn't melt in your fingers or feel cold; and it had a delicious taste, like buckwheat cakes, maple molasses, sausages, baked apples, turkey, cranberry sauce, and nuts and raisins, all at once. Max broke it in two, and while Thekla sucked one half and he the other, February began:—

"It's only about the bears in the North-West Hollow."

"Bears!" cried Max: "what bears?"

"A real nice family of bears who live up there. Last year when I saw them, they were little fellows about the size of kittens; but they are quite

big now, and have got grown-up growls. I thought perhaps you 'd like to hear about 'em."

Oh, wouldn't they ? Both children crept close to him, and drank in every word with red cheeks and round eyes.

"Bears !" cried Max, quite stuttering with excitement. "I didn't know there were any in the Forest. Oh, do go on !"

"They used to lie all curled up in a heap," continued February, "at the bottom of a nest in the rocks, which their mother had lined with leaves and moss to keep them warm. They looked just like funny bundles of brown hair. There were four of them, — Snap, Snooze, Roll-about, and Greedy. Roll-about was the fattest and the best-natured, but they were all nice. They lay tangled together, and couldn't help pulling each other's fur a good deal; but they quarrelled much less than most brothers and sisters who live in such close quarters.

"I went away before they were old enough to

go out, so I couldn't tell you much about them if it were not for April. April and I," said February, with a sentimental air, "were always great friends. She used to see the Mamma Bear and her little ones go walking together. One day when they were in the wood a barking of dogs and blowing of horns was heard.

"Run! run!" cried Mamma; and off they went,—all but Greedy who had straggled away in pursuit of a honey-tree. He was too young to know how to take care of himself, and getting confused ran into the very track of the hunters. They would have killed him, but one shouted, 'Take him alive! take him alive! I want him;' so instead they put him into a sack and carried him away.

"Nothing more was heard of him for a long time. The others were sorry, but they went prowling about all summer stuffing themselves with good things, and did very well without him. By October they were as fat as pigs. And all of a sudden one day, as they were lunch-

ing on ground-nuts in a lonely place among the hills, as happy and friendly as could be, they heard a scratching of claws, and smelt a fur which seemed uncommonly familiar; and lo and behold! it was Greedy, back again, as big as any of them, but not nearly so fat.

Of course they growled with astonishment, and flew to meet him. He was glad too, but his manner seemed a little cold. Where had he been? Oh! he had been in a town of Germany getting his education. And where had he been living? Oh! in the family of his tutor of course. Slept in the same room with the children, and treated like a child. None of them knew what a tutor might be; and Roll-about asked innocently if it was something good to eat, but Greedy shook his head. The town was a college town, he said. All persons of refinement were sent there to study.

"Are you a person of refinement, Greedy?" asked little Snooze.

"Greedy froze him with a look. He didn't an-

swer, but went on with his tale. He had learned to dance. He could pick out the Ace of Hearts, and A, B, and Z from the alphabet. He could jump over a stick. This last he did on the spot, to show them how it went; and, in the middle of the jump, Snap noticed something which made him cry out, ‘O Greedy! your poor paws! What is the matter with them? They’re all brown, and dried up?’

“Greedy looked foolish. ‘Oh!’ he replied, ‘that’s nothing: they — they — got a little burnt one day, — that’s all, — on some hot iron. Stoves are very hot in Germany.’

“Mamma looked queer when she heard this, and relieved her feelings by a low growl. The little ones could not tell what to make of it.

“When asked how he managed to get back, Greedy explained it in this way: ‘He was travelling,’ he said, ‘with some friends. They were in a cage together, which was the fashionable way of going about just now. By an accident, the cage upset and some of the bars broke; and,

as it was so near home, Greedy thought he might as well run over, and make them a visit.' All this he said with a lofty air, and the brothers and sister believed every word of it; but Mamma put her tongue in her cheek, and gently pointed over her left shoulder with her paw.

"They had a grand walk home; but no sooner had they got there, than Greedy began to find fault with every thing in the most unpleasant manner. The Hollow was the dampest hole he ever had seen. No place was fit to live in without a stove. As for the food, it was horrid. It gave him the stomach-ache, he declared; and he called for beef-steaks, as if he expected a butcher to appear round the corner. When the honey-comb was brought in, he fell upon it tooth and nail, and ate a great deal more than his share. Mamma reproved him; but he snubbed her, and said that was the way all the children did in the city; and when poor little Roll-about, who had to go without any, gave a low whine or two just to comfort herself, he boxed her ears with his

paw savagely, and then excused himself by telling them that Master Jack, his tutor's son, often cuffed his sister, Miss Gretchen, in that way, and nobody took any notice. It wasn't any particular consolation to Roll-about to hear of it, and she crept away into a lonely corner, and moaned and licked her paws for a long time.

"Master Jack and Miss Gretchen," — how the Bear family did learn to hate those children! Every rude and disagreeable thing Greedy did, he quoted them as examples. Jack, it seemed, said, 'I won't,' and fought for his dinner; and Gretchen scratched and bit right and left; and they quarrelled with each other. Their evil example had ruined all that was good in poor Greedy. He said the most unpleasant things. He found fault with every thing. He pitched into the others on all occasions, and boxed Roll-about's ears till the hair grew quite thin. Then he advised her to use 'bears' grease.' 'All the city young ladies did so,' he said; but what good was that, when the poor little thing could get

none but her own, — or his, which, as you may suppose, he wasn't very likely to offer her !

"‘Oh,’ Mrs. Bear used to say to herself, ‘if I only had Master Jack and Miss Gretchen here, wouldn’t I give them a lesson ?’ And as Greedy, for all his fault-finding, had such a big appetite, that provisions were growing scarce, two or three bad children, needing to be eaten by way of example, *would* have been convenient. Every thing went wrong in the once happy home. The brothers and sisters were always sulking in corners, and complaining to each other in low growls of the way in which Greedy had treated them. Roll-about lost her plump sides, and grew thin. Snap was finding out the advantages of bad temper, and beginning to carry on like Greedy. At last Mrs. Bear declared she would stand it no longer.

"‘You are grown up,’ she said : ‘go out and shift for yourself. As long as you were good and content, I was glad to have you here: now

you only make my life miserable, and I can't endure it.' And she raised her large paw, and showed her teeth, for the first time in her life ; and Greedy, with a snarl of fright, slunk away from the den.

"Out of her sight, however, his temper revived. He got into a great huff. 'Leave the den?' Of course he would, and very glad to see the last of it. So he went and chose a hole for himself to live in. It was quite close to the village,—a great deal too close for safety. But the silly creature had lost all his instinct by living with human beings. And whenever the bells rang or any thing seemed to be going on, he would rush out to peep, and find what it was. I only wonder they didn't catch him long ago."

"Did they catch him, then ?" asked Max.

"You shall hear. Only yesterday it was that a caravan with a band of music came into the village. Greedy heard the sounds, and it seemed as if he would go wild. He dodged among the bushes, and looked on as long as he could stand

it, and then, seized with a desire to distinguish himself, out he came. The circus people couldn't believe their eyes when they saw him prancing after them, his head on one side, and taking steps like a dancing-master. Of course such a prize was not to be resisted. They lost no time; and, when I caught sight of them, poor Greedy had already a muzzle on his jaws and a rope round his neck. A boy was banging his sides with a stick, his tail was between his legs, and I must say," ended February, laughing heartily, "he didn't look particularly happy at being taken back into fashionable life after this manner."

"That's first-rate," cried Max, in fits of amusement.

"I'm so glad you liked it," replied February, much pleased. "Now I'll trouble you for my thumb-nail and left ear-tip."

The can was brought, and Max carefully measured out what was wanted. February kissed Thekla's hand (the tip of his nose felt *very*

cold), made a clumsy bow to both, and went away.

The children hugged each other. "If they're all like that," cried they, "how jolly it will be!"



GREEDY.



"Then the Tot said, 'Budda hundry.' "

CHAPTER III.

LITTLE TOT.

FEBRUARY went by like a flash, or the children thought so. It was really a short month: but, besides, they were very busy; and work, you know, makes time fly. Thekla, who had just

learned to spin, had a job on hand of which she was proud. It was no less than spinning and carding the wool for a bran-new suit of clothes which Max was to wear next year. Dyed brown, and woven by Mother Gretel the cunning weaver, they were to be something grand. As for Max, his work was wood-carving. Nearly all the German boys can carve; and he and Thekla thought the spoon over which he was so busy, and which had grape leaves and tendrils on the handle, most beautiful. It would go to the great Spring Fair, and fetch a large price, perhaps as much as a silver dollar. Altogether, they could hardly believe the calendar when it showed them a month had gone by, and that evening they must look for another visitor.

It was a dark night, and very cold. As they sat by the fire waiting, they could hear the frost cracking and snapping the tree-boughs. Now and then a crash like thunder came. It was a limb, overloaded with ice, breaking off, and fall-

ing to the ground. And by and by, among the other noises, a strange, wild voice began to mingle, making them all more fearful. It was March, who, as he came through the forest, was talking to himself.

"Blow, blow!" he was saying. "I'm coming on to blow. Rock, rock! There'd better be no babies in *my* tree-tops. To and fro, to and fro, roots and trunks alike, and the very stones must laugh and roll if I choose to tickle them." And then he gave a loud thump at the door, and, without waiting answer, banged it open and marched in. He looked so big and fierce and stormy that Thekla shrank back, without daring to push forward a stool for him to sit upon; and even Max, who had pluck enough for ten boys, felt afraid.

"Won't you sit down, sir?" he said at last very meekly, and went to shut the door, which March had left open. Quite a little heap of dead leaves and snow had collected on the sill; and Thekla, who was a born housewife, ran to brush them

up. March twirled round on his stool, and watched her proceedings with great scorn.

"Sweep!" he said in a voice like a big wind. "You call *that* sweeping? You should see me when I get at it. I scoop up all the leaves in the world at once, and send them spinning. Whole snow-storms go into my dust-pan. Ho! ho!"

"But I am so little," replied Thekla, in her bird's voice; "and, beside, I have brushed up all there are."

"All there are? Nonsense," cried March; "but no matter. Am I, or am I not to tell a story? If not, let me know at once; for I have an engagement with a couple of hurricanes, and want to be off. A pretty business," he went on, glaring fiercely, "to sit here by this melting fire to amuse a couple of thieving brats, when I have so much to do. Ho! ho!"

"Oh!" whispered Thekla to Max, "let's give him his moments, and let him go: he makes me afraid."

"Not I," said Max, who was plucking up courage, "not if I know it!—Of course you are to tell a story," he continued aloud: "you promised, and you ought to be a Month of your word. Thekla, put away that broom. Now we're all ready, sir."

March scowled, but made no resistance. As Max had said, he was a Month of his word; and he began in a queer voice, which was now loud and then soft, now dying away to a murmur and then bellowing out again in a way that made you jump.

"Once upon a time, as I was driving across a prairie, I saw a house."

"I don't know what a prairie is," said Thekla, gently.

"I don't suppose you do," growled March: "that's one of the things you don't know, and there are a good many more of 'em. A prairie's a big field without any fences, and several thousand miles square. People live there,—some people do: I spend a good deal of time

there myself. First-rate place for a promenade,—no corners to turn, plenty of room. As I said, I saw a house.

"There was a snow-storm along with me. We had nine hundred billion horses, all white as wool; and we went fast. Killing pace. Horses kept dropping down dead, lay in heaps wherever we went; and we left 'em there. About four million dashed up against the house I was telling you about. They 'most covered it up, for it wasn't a big house. There were two little windows and a door. Windows had curtains; but one was slipped aside, and the fire looked out like a red eye. I didn't like that; so I put my eye to the other side, to see if I couldn't look him down.

"Funniest thing I ever saw!" said March, giving a hoarse chuckle. "Such tots! Biggest only four years old; t' other not a year. There was a pussy too. They three — true, on my word — were the only creatures in the house that night."

"Where could their father and mother be?" asked Max, excessively interested.

"Oh! went off that morning to the town,—like fools,—and couldn't get back. We saw to that. Stuck in ten drifts, most frozen to death. Wife half-crazy about the babies; husband just managed to get to shelter. Ho! ho!" cried March. "Served 'em right, I say. Ho! ho!

"Don't you think, that Tot, the biggest one, was putting a stick of wood on the fire when I looked in? Stick as big as she was, almost! How she did it was a mystery. Little apron blew into the flame, but I flew up the chimney and blew it the other way. 'Tisn't often I do a good turn, but I couldn't help it then."

"That was right," said Thekla.

"Hold your tongue!" cried March, rudely. "What do you know about it? Two sticks that little thing got on. I never did! How she managed it, and such a baby!"

"Then she put a shawl over the other tot. Patted the corners down just like an old woman, and put one on herself. Hind side before, but no matter for that. Then she got into bed, and sang,

'Hush by, Budda,—hus' by, Budda,' till the baby went to sleep. Then she went to sleep too. I thought I'd like to see what would happen when they woke up, so I sent the snow-storm on and stayed behind with my eye to the chink.

"I'm not a tender-hearted person myself," said March, modestly, "but really I couldn't bear to disturb those children. Several times I wanted to roar dreadfully,—roaring is one of my greatest pleasures,—but I didn't. I never quite knew why, but so it was. The snow isn't noisy, so it was as still all night about the little house as if it had been mid-summer.

"I watched, and the children slept. By and by when morning came, the baby woke up and began to cry. The Tot patted him and said, 'Hush-a-by, Budda,' a great many times; but he wouldn't stop. Babies don't stop," added March, reflectively, "as a general thing. Then the Tot said, 'Budda hundry;' and she got up, and tugged and tugged to put a stick on the fire, and fetched a tin cup and spoon, and set them

on a chair by the table where there was a milk-pan. She had to tip it with her little hands, and a great deal spilled on the floor and a great deal on her apron, but some went in the cup. She began to cry at first; then she said, 'Mamie didn't mean to,' and brightened up again. And she warmed the milk and fed that baby like a woman," cried March, giving his knee a great slap. "*I never did!* Baby ate it all, and went to sleep again. Tot drank some too, but not much. Wanted to save it for the baby, I guess.

"It was a very cold day. I kept in a long time; but at last I *had* to howl or I should have burst. Tot got frightened. She said her little prayers, and hid her head under the pillow; but when the other cried, she stopped, and gave him some milk, and sang, 'Hush by, Budda,' till he went off again. I tell you what," said March, "I did feel sorry for that child.

"There was only one stick of wood left, and that was a big one. Tot couldn't move it. Pussy got on the table, and lapped up all the milk in

the pan. Then Tot cried hard, and said, 'Mamma, come! oh do come!' over and over. She put all the clothes there were on the bed. When the baby cried, she patted him with her little hand, and cried too. When morning came, they were both still. I could see them through the window. Away off on the prairie I heard the slow jingle of a bell.

"'Hurry! hurry!' I roared, 'or you'll be too late.' Then I scooped up the snow, and blew open a path. The sleigh got nearer. The woman couldn't wait. She held out her arms to the cottage. At last she jumped into the snow (it was up to her waist), and floundered to the door. She beat upon it, threw it open, and cried out, 'Mary! baby! O my baby!'

"They lay in the bed; but no little voices answered. The mother gave a loud scream. 'Oh, they are dead!' she shrieked, and flung herself over them.

"The men ran in. There were four of them. They built a fire and warmed blankets, and put hot milk into the mouths of the little ones.

"This little fellow isn't dead," said one of them. He wasn't. Pretty soon he opened his eyes, and when he saw his mother he began to cry. Tot had wrapped him up so warm that the cold didn't kill him,—only made him dull.

"It took longer to bring her round, but at last they did. And the first thing she said was, 'Mamie didn't mean to spill the milk.'

"I declare," said March with a frog in his throat, "I never did see the beat of that child."

"And is that the end?" asked Thekla, who had been quietly crying for some time past over little Tot's troubles.

"Of course it's the end," replied March. "What did you expect? And a very nice story it is, though I say it as shouldn't."

"And now I'm off," shouted he, and made a rush for the door.

"One minute!" cried Max: "you've forgotten something. Here's your moments, you know. And then there is the present you were to give us: don't leave that out."

"I'm glad you reminded me," said March,— "very glad indeed." His wild eyes sparkled with a fierce light which was ugly to see. With one hand he seized his "moments," the other was fumbling in his pocket.

"Here it is!" he cried, and flung something in their faces. Another instant he had banged the door and was gone. They could hear him roaring and whooping as he went.

The poor children — all red in the face, sneezing, coughing — looked at each other.

"Ow! ow!" cried Max.

"Thzs! thzs!" responded Thekla.

March's present was a bad cold in the head !



LITTLE TOT AND THE BABY ASLEEP.

CHAPTER IV.

"MARIA."

SUCH colds! Never was any thing like them. Day after day Max sat by the fire with a splitting headache, cold chills running down his back; while night after night Thekla awoke, coughing and choking from a spot in her throat which burned like a live coal. I can tell you, when March gives a present he does it in real earnest.

They were so miserable you might have thought that even March must pity them a little. But he didn't,—not a bit. As he told the children, he was any thing but a "tender-hearted person." When they were at the very worst, they could hear him astride the roof, roaring and

whooping down the chimney in the most unfeeling way; and he regularly banged the door open



“One day in an old garret I found the doll, who, as I said, was living
in a closet.”

on cold nights to let the wind in; so that, at last, Max never thought of sitting down to supper without first putting a heavy chair against it to keep it shut. So blustering and ill-tempered a Month was never known. But at last his turn came to go; and, by that time, what with patience and catnip tea the children had begun to get better.

There is a great difference, however, between being *better* and being well. Thekla’s hands were still too weak and thin to twirl the spindle, and for many a day the wood-carving had lain untouched in the cupboard. It seemed as if they were too languid to enjoy any thing; and, when the evening came for April’s visit, Max would hardly take the trouble to rise and fetch the can, though Thekla reminded him. After it was brought out, however, and the fire poked into a blaze, they felt a little brighter. Poor things, it was a long time since any thing pleasant had happened to them!

The night was still. The noisy winds had

fallen asleep, so that you could hear the least sounds far away in the forest. By and by light footsteps became audible, drawing nearer; and Max had time to run for a chair and place it in the cosiest corner, before a soft tap fell upon the door.

“May I come in?” said a voice, very gently and politely. How different from rude March!

This was April. She looked very young and small; and, as Thekla went forward to greet her, she felt as if it were some little visitor of her own age come to tea. It was with a sense of protection and hospitality that she took from her hand a great bundle, which seemed heavy. April sat down, and then she put her arm round Thekla’s waist and pulled her nearer, bundle and all. She had an odd, pretty face when you came to look at it. The lips laughed of themselves; but the eyes, which were blue and misty, seemed to have tears behind them all ready to fill. Or if, as sometimes happened, the lips took a fancy to pout, then the eyes had their turn, and

brightened and twinkled so that you could not help smiling. It would have puzzled anybody whether to call the countenance most sad or most merry. April's hair was all wavy and blowsy, as if she had been out in a gale of wind. Two or three violets were stuck in it; and the voice with which she spoke sounded like the tinkle of rain-drops on the leaves.

“Look,” she said, “what I have brought you!” and she unfastened the bundle, which was pinned together with a long red thorn.

O mercy! It seemed as if the sun, which went to bed three hours ago, had got up again, and was pouring over April's lap on to the kitchen floor. For there lay a great heap of dandelions, golden and splendid, which perked up their heads, and laughed and winked on all around. The whole room seemed to brighten from their glorious color. And, what was funny, these dandelions had voices, as it seemed; for out of the middle of the heap came queer sounds of peeping and chirping, which the children could not at all understand.

April laughed. She parted the flowers, and there were two little new-born chicks, as yellow as the yolk of an egg. They were soft and downy; and their cunning black eyes and little beaks gave them a knowing look, which was astonishing, when you recollectcd how short a time they had been in the world. “Cheep! cheep!” they cried, and one ran directly into Thekla’s outstretched hands. The warm fingers felt to it like a nest; and the little creature cuddled down contentedly, with a soft note which expressed comfort. The other, April handed to Max.

“They are for you,” she said. “If you like them and take care of them, you may have a whole poultry-yard some day. My broods are not always lucky; but these will be.”

“Like them,” indeed! You should have seen the happy fuss which went on over the new pets. Max ran for a basket; Thekla brought flannel to line it, and meal and water; and the chicks were kissed, fed, and tucked away as if they had been babies. By and by they fell fast asleep under

their warm coverlet; and then the children went back to the fire, and, while Max made ringlets of the dandelion-stalks and stuck them in Thekla’s hair, April began :—

“My story isn’t much,” she said. “I’ve told so many in the course of my life that I’m quite exhausted, for I make it a rule never to tell the same twice. Some are so sad that it makes me cry merely to think of them,”— and as she said this April’s tears suddenly rained down her face,— “and others so jolly that I should split my sides if I tried.” Here April giggled like a school-girl, and her eyes seemed to send out rays of sun which danced on the wet tear-stains. “So it must always be new,” she went on; “and, ever since I saw you, I’ve been trying to decide what it should be. There *was* a delightful one about ducklings which I thought of,— but no!” and she solemnly shook her head.

“Oh, why not? Do, pray do!” cried Max.

“Couldn’t,” said April. “That story—the first half of it at least—I told to a little girl in

England last year. I didn’t finish because something came along and set me crying, but half is just as bad as the whole. I couldn’t tell that again. Don’t look so disappointed, though! I’ve got one for you; and, though it isn’t one of my best, I dare say you’ll like it well enough. It’s about a doll.”

“A doll! Pshaw!” said Max, impolitely.

“Why, what a rude boy you are!” cried April, beginning to sob. “I declare, I ne—never was t—treated so before.”

“Max!” exclaimed Thekla, “how could you? You’ve hurt her feelings. Don’t cry any more, dear,” she went on,—for somehow Thekla felt older and bigger than this fascinating little maiden who laughed and cried by turns,—“he didn’t mean to. He is a real kind boy, only sometimes he speaks before he thinks. And I like dolls—oh, so much!”

“Do you?” said April, brightening. “Then it’s all right. As for you,” she added, turning sharply round on Max, “you can go out and sit on the steps, if you don’t want to hear it.”

“Oh!” stammered Max, dreadfully ashamed of himself, “I do. I’d just as lief hear it as not. And I beg your pardon, if I spoke rudely.”

“Very well then,” said April, pacified. “If you feel that way, I’ll proceed. This doll lived in a closet. I should never have come across her probably if it hadn’t been for the house-cleaning.

“You must know that there are countries in the world where every spring and fall the houses are all turned upside down and inside out, and then downside up and outside in, all for the sake of being clean. The women do it. What becomes of the men I don’t know: they climb trees or something to be out of the way, I suppose. I like these times, of all things. I like to swing the heavy carpets to and fro on the lines, and flap the maids’ aprons into their faces as they stand on the ledge outside to wash the windows. It is great fun. And I love to creep into holes and corners, and rummage and poke about to see what folks have got. And one

day, when doing this in an old garret, I found the doll, who, as I said, was living in a closet. They had put her there to be out of the way of the cleaning.

“Her name was Maria. She was big, but not very beautiful. Her head was dented, and there were marks of finger-nails on her cheeks, which were faded and of a purplish-pink. But her arms and legs were bran new, and white as snow, and her body was round and full of sawdust. I couldn’t understand this at all until she explained it. Her head, it seemed, was twenty-five years old; and her body had only been in the world six weeks!

“Once, she said, she had possessed a body just the same age as her head, and then she belonged to a person she called ‘Baby May.’ Baby May used to bump her on the floor, and dig the soft wax out of her cheeks with her nails. This treatment soon ruined her good looks; and when she mentioned this, Maria almost cried,—but not quite, because, as she said, years had taught her

self-command. I don’t know what she meant,” added April, reflectively. “I’m sure years never taught *me* any thing of the sort. However, that is neither here nor there! If she hadn’t had a fine constitution, Maria never could have endured all this cruelty. Her body didn’t. It soon sank under its sufferings; and, after spitting saw-dust for some months, wasted away so much that May’s mother said it must go into the rag-bag. People make a great fuss about having their heads cut off, but Maria said it was quite easy if the scissors were sharp. Snip, snip, rip, rip, and there you are. The head was put carefully away in a wardrobe because it was so handsome, and May’s mamma promised to buy a new body for it; but somehow she forgot, and by and by May grew so big that she didn’t care to play with dolls any more. So Maria’s head went on living in the wardrobe. Having no longer any cares of the body to disturb it, it gave itself up to the cultivation of the intellect. A wardrobe is a capital place for study, it appears. People keep

their best things there, and rarely come to disturb them. At night, when the house is asleep, they wake up and talk together, and tell secrets. The silk gowns converse about the fine parties they have gone to, and the sights they have seen. There were several silk gowns in the wardrobe. One of them had a large spot of ice-cream on its front breadth. She used to let the other things smell it, that they might know what luxury was like; and once Maria got a chance, and licked it with her tongue, but she said it didn’t taste as she expected. There was an India shawl, too, which would lift the lid of its box, and relate stories — oh, so interesting! — about black faces and white turbans and hot sunshine. The laces in the drawer came from Belgium. That was a place to learn geography! And the Roman pearls had a history too. They were devout Catholics, and would tell their beads all night if nobody seemed to be listening. But the Coral in the drawer below was Red Republican in its opinions, and made no attempt to hide it. Both

hailed from Italy, but they were always quarrelling! Oh, Maria knew a deal! As she grew wise, she ceased to care for tea-parties, and being taken out to walk as formerly. All she wanted was to gain information, and strengthen her mind. At least so she said; but for all that,” remarked April, with a sly smile, “she had some lingering regard for looks still, for she complained bitterly of the change in her complexion. Perhaps it was putting so much inside her head made the outside so dull and shabby!

“Well, for twenty-three long years Maria lived in the wardrobe at the head of polite society. She was treated with great respect. The dresses always bowed to her when they went in and out. When their time came for being ripped up and pieced into bedquilts, they said farewell with many tears. All this gratified her feelings, of course. So you can imagine what a shock it was when, one day, the wardrobe door was suddenly opened, and she was lifted down and laid in a pair of little clutching hands, which grasped

her eagerly. A small thumb-nail pierced her left cheek. ‘I could have screamed,’ said Maria; ‘but where would have been the use? Dolls have positively *no* rights.’”

“Who was it took her down?” asked Max, quite forgetful of his original scorn about Maria’s history.

“It was Baby May. Not the same May, but another as like her as two peas. In fact, the first May was grown up; and this was her little girl. Grandmamma had bought a beautiful new body, and now Maria’s head had to be sewed on to it. Her feelings when the stitches were put in, she said, she could never describe. They were like those of a poor old soldier, who, after living fifty years on his pension, finds himself dragged from pipe and chimney-corner, and obliged to begin again as a drummer-boy.”

“It was really cruel, I think,” said Thekla, indignantly.

“Yes,” said April; “but you haven’t heard the worst. Think of being suddenly united to such

a young body! There was Maria, elderly and dignified, full of wisdom and experience, longing for nothing so much as to be left alone to think over the facts she had learned. And there were her arms and legs always wanting to be in motion. New, impulsive, full of sawdust, it was misery to them to be still. They wanted to dance and frisk all the time, to wear fine clothes, to have other dolls come on visits, to drink tea out of the baby-house tea-set, and have a good time generally. When Maria assured them that she was tired of these things, and had seen the vanity of them, they said they wanted to see the vanity too! And if ever she got a quiet chance, and had fallen into a reverie about old times and friends,—the silk stockings in the wardrobe, for instance, and the touching story they had told her; or the shoe-buckles, who were exiles from their country,—all of a sudden her obstreperous limbs would assert themselves, out would flourish her legs, up fly her hands and hit her in the eye, and the first thing she knew she would be tumbled out on to

the floor. Just think what a trial to a lady of fine education and manners! It was enough to vex a saint. She assured me she had lost at least three scruples of wax. But nobody cared in the least about her scruples.”

“And what became of the poor thing in the end?” asked Thekla.

“That I can’t say,” replied April: “I had to come away, you know; and I left her there. One of two things, she told me, was pretty sure to happen: either her arms and legs would sober with time, or she would get so hideous from unhappiness that May’s mamma would buy a new head to match them. ‘Then, ah then!’ said she, ‘I may perhaps be allowed to go back to my beloved top-shelf in the wardrobe. Never, never will I quit it again so long as I live!’ She ended with a sigh. I bade her farewell, but on the way downstairs I met a little girl coming up and calling out, ‘Where dolly? me want dolly!’ And I fear poor Maria was not left any longer in peace in the attic closet.”

April closed her story. She took her moments from the can, poured the dandelions into Thekla’s lap, and rose to go.

“I am late,” she said: “all my violets must be made before midnight. I have none but these few in my hair.”

“Not yet,—stay a little longer!” pleaded the children.

“Ah, no!” said April: “I must go. You won’t miss me long: May is coming, my sister May. Everybody loves her better than they do me,” and she wiped her eyes dolefully as she shut the door.

“What a goose I am!” she cried, flinging it open again, with a merry laugh. “Don’t mind my nonsense. Good-by, dears,—good-by ! ”

Oh, how cheerful the kitchen seemed now! Where were the colds and the disconsolate looks? All gone; and Max and Thekla laughed gayly into each other’s faces.

"I'll tell you what," said Max, "if April didn't cry so easily, she'd be one of the jolliest girls in the world."



"Good-by, dears!"



"Round his head she put a wreath of long sprays. It was great fun."

CHAPTER V.

MAY'S GARDEN.

THE chicks thrived. Day by day their legs grew strong, their yellow bodies round and full, and their calls for food more clamorous.

As the snow melted, and the sun made warm spots on the earth, they began to run from the cottage-door, and poke and scratch about with their bills. But they always came back to the basket to sleep; and Thekla prepared their food, and watched over them as well as any old hen could have done.

She found time for this in the midst of other work. There was much to do, after a whole month's neglect: the house needed cleaning and setting to rights, and the yarn for the new suit must be finished at once. The busy wheel hummed and whirred more noisily than ever, in the afternoons, now growing long and bright; and Max, his cold quite cured, sat by, with his carving-tools, as busy as she. Altogether, the time flew rapidly; and the cheerfulness left by April's visit still lay upon the cottage when the evening came for May to appear.

There was no languor or dulness this time. The hearth was cleanly swept, and the door left ajar that the guest might see the light as she

walked through the Forest. But so quiet was her coming, that her hand was on the latch before they knew it, and both of them jumped at the sound of her knock. As she came in, they saw that a lamb was trotting beside her, held by a band of young spring grasses, curiously woven together.

"This is my present," she said.

Judge if the children danced for joy. A lamb! a real lamb! all for their own! Never was any thing like it. They patted the pretty creature, and lavished caresses upon him, till finally the chicks woke up at the stir, peeped, called, and at last flew out of their baskets to see what was going on; and one of them fluttered up on to the lamb's back, where he sat like a yellow buttercup on a bank of snow. May gazed upon the scene with a calm smile.

"Now," she said at last, "if you 're quite done, I 'll venture to remind you that my time 's important. Business first, and pleasure after.

Suppose you put off kissing that creature again until I am gone."

Thus admonished, the children reluctantly left the lamb, tied by his grassy chain to the dresser, and came back to the fire. So far they had been almost too busy to look at May; but now they did. At first Thekla thought her the sweetest thing she had ever seen. Her hair curled like the tendrils of a wild grape; no shell was ever lined with lovelier pink than the bloom of her cheek. But, as she gazed, Thekla became aware of an expression which contradicted the tender lines of the face,—a certain teasing look, a frostiness about the blue eyes, which baffled and surprised her. The same quality appeared in her words, and even in the soft voice which uttered them. Fair and winsome as she was, Thekla did not venture close, as she had done to April, but clung tightly to Max's hand while she listened.

"I reminded you," proceeded May, "because I have really too much to do to allow of my wast-

ing time. Very few Months have the work put upon them that I have. June pretends to be busy; but, after all, most of it is finishing off what I began. And as for April, she is a sad, idle girl, and does almost nothing. Why, I came upon her just now," said May, in an aggrieved voice; "and there she was having a game of play with that good-for-nothing Jack Frost, tickling him with her warm fingers and screaming with laughter; and of course I shall be expected to make up for all she leaves incomplete. There's the great wash of the year, for instance. It fairly belongs to her; but she never *will* do it. And I've all the plants to wake too, which is a hard job, for they are the sleepiest little things imaginable; and the gardens to tidy, and all. So you won't wonder that I can't spare many minutes for telling stories.

"Did you ever have a garden?" she went on.

"Oh, yes!" replied Thekla. "Max makes me one every summer."

"It's very pleasant," said May; "but when

your flower-beds are as big as all outdoors, as mine are, there 's a great deal of care and responsibility in them, I assure you. I like it, however. I enjoy sowing millions of seeds, and setting little roots to straggle, and pruning and clipping. Every flower that ever grew is in my list, and I manage to see it in bloom somewhere or other. If I were subject to rose-cold, I should go crazy; for smelling is my delight. Ah! you should see my rose-beds in Damascus. But the nicest garden I ever made was a very tiny one which was planted to please some little children. Shall I tell you about it?"

"Oh, yes, do!" cried Max.

"It was in a cold country, a long way from here, which I never visit till pretty late in the season. You have to cross the sea to get to it. Once only red people lived there. They dwelt in wigwams, and didn't care much for me, except that I melted the snow which kept them from their hunting-grounds. But one year, on arriving I found something new. A ship

lay on the shore, and people with white faces were pitching tents and building huts as if they meant to stay. Among them were some children.

"Of these, two particularly took my fancy, two little sisters, fair as lilies. One was almost a baby. When they sat at the door of the tent, I used to steal up unseen, and pat their cheeks with my hand. They did not know it was I ; but they liked it.

"The men were busy in cutting trees for the houses.. The women had to cook and wash and sew. There was hard work in plenty for all. No one had time to amuse the little ones, and the idea occurred to me of making them a garden."

"That was good of you," said Thekla, her heart warming to this Month who was so kind to little children.

"Ah !" replied May, coldly, "you think so ?" Thekla felt snubbed, and she said no more.

"The place I chose," said May, resuming her

story, "was a good way off in the woods, a hidden nook, just such as I love. The trees stood thickly about it, but they opened and left a spot where the sunshine could come in and warm the earth. There for many days I worked with busy fingers, clearing away dead leaves and roots, and covering the ground with a moss carpet thick and soft, into which tiny coral points were stuck to please baby eyes. In the very middle I set a snow-white mushroom, glistening and white as an ivory umbrella; and all about it I planted and wreathed the sweetest flower I know,—a flower whose cups are as pink as a rose, and hold a fragrance so rare, that if a perfumer could collect it in his bottles it would be worth its weight in gold. When all was done, it was the daintiest little garden ever seen; and now it only remained to entice the babies thither to enjoy it.

"This was easy. I selected a warm day, that they might not catch cold; and, as they sat at the door of the tent, I crept up and sat beside them.

They did not see me, but I whispered in their ears,— a low, coaxing whisper which I only use for babies.

"‘In the woods,’ I said, ‘the pretty, pretty woods, are such beautiful things! Red flowers and blue flowers, for you to play with; and squirrels with frisky tails, and birds which sing all the time. Oh, such fun as it is !’

“The baby laughed out, and showed her teeth white as milk; but it was only at the song in my voice, the words she did not understand. The elder one listened; and, as I went on, her small feet began to twitch and dance, as if they could no longer keep still.

“‘Come, Sissy,’ she said. ‘Let’s go and take a walk over yonder where it is so green. Sister ’ll find you some flowers to play with.’

“Baby was all ready for that, or any thing else. To her, ‘Sister’ was quite a grown-up person, because she could talk plain, and wore a funny little russet petticoat like their mother’s. So side by side the little lambs trotted away.

There was nobody on the watch to see them go, and soon the dark wood hid them from view. I held 'Sister's' other hand, and gently guided to the right path.

"It wasn't much of a path. There were tangled mosses and rough boughs to catch the little feet; but I held fast, and did not let them trip. And by and by, when we came to a smoother place, I took from my bosom a butterfly I had brought on purpose, and set it flying before their eyes. There was no danger of tears or fright after that.

"Such a jolly race as then began! I had ordered the butterfly to fly slowly, so the clutching fingers seemed always just about to grasp it. Such funny, tripping steps, such peals of glee! Never was a merrier hunt! The hunt led them a long way. Once Baby's fingers almost closed on the painted wings, but still the butterfly flew before, and still the children ran behind; when all at once a third baby appeared, to share the chase — another child, a tiny Indian boy. No

dress hid his small, dark limbs. A little bow was in his hand, a quiver on his back; and as he jumped from behind a bush, and joined in the frolic, it was like a brown twig flying after two snow-white blossoms blown from the tree.

"The little ones were not frightened. They took kindly to a new playmate, whatever his color might be. 'Sister' made friends at once, while Baby stared at him with her big blue eyes. On they trotted together; and by and by the nimble boy made a clutch which secured the butterfly, and the brown head and the fair ones met together over the prize.

"'Pitty! pitty!' cried Baby, and she patted the little Indian with her soft hand. Then the same soft fingers made a grab at the purple wings. Ah me! one of them came off in her grasp. My poor butterfly! The first of the season!

"The children were sorry. Children are always sorry," said May, tartly, "after the mischief is done; but I don't see that it makes them

any more careful next time. In two minutes the dead insect was forgotten by everybody but me. I picked him up, you may be sure; and that evening made him a little grave under a partridge-berry vine.

"It was droll to hear the three babies talk together. They had no words in common; but they had fingers to point with, comical little heads to nod and wag, and eyes to explain the meaning of each gesture. So they got on wonderfully. The brown baby's name was Al-a-gon-qua, but 'Sister' called him Ally.

"'My name Ruth,' she said, 'her name Baby,' speaking very loud to make it easier to understand.

"Ally tried to say it, but couldn't get nearer than 'Tute.' This was stupid; but he was a clever baby, for all that. He could take straight aim with his bow, and bring down a robin or a quail ten yards off. He knew how to find the water-springs. He could climb a tree, and swim like a jolly little polliwog. Fearless as a squirrel, he sprang about the trackless wilderness without

pathway or guide, and needed neither, and knew no fear.

"All the time they talked, the little ones were getting deeper and deeper into the wood. They did not know where they were going; but I knew, and guided every step.

"And now they reached the garden. The sun lay warm and bright on the moss; and, at sight of the fairy cups of pink and snow and of the ivory mushroom, they laughed for joy.

"'Pitty! pitty!' cried Baby again, using her sole little word; and, with one consent, all three sat down together in the midst of the flowers. How I did enjoy it! The long, cold voyage at sea, the bleak spring, the crowded home in the tents where all were too busy to notice them, were forgotten as they sat there in my garden; and they buzzed like bees in the sunshine. It was the sweetest sight to see!

"Such games as they played! Baby pulled flowers till her lap was full. She tossed them about. She put heaps of them on her head, and screamed with laughter as they rained down into

her eyes. Ruth meantime was turning the little Indian into a big nosegay. She stuck leaves all over him. His quiver she filled with blossoms. Round his head she put a wreath of long sprays. It was great fun. Luckily, the small russet petticoat had a pocket, and in it was a big ship's-biscuit; so, when dinner-time came, they ate that, and were not hungry. As long as the sun shone, the play lasted; and he stayed late that night, as if to enjoy the pretty show as long as possible. But at last the long shadows had begun to creep over the place, and I to feel embarrassed as to how to get my babies home again, when the bark of a dog was heard close at hand. Then I was easy; for I knew somebody was coming to find them.

“Sure enough, before the dusk had crept over the happy group in the sun, they came,—two men with anxious faces, and guns on their shoulders, and a pale, frightened woman. That was the Mother. They could hardly believe what they saw. Bears and savages had been in their thoughts all the way. Never once had

they dreamed that the little ones were playing in *my* garden.

"How the woman ran when she saw the children! How she caught up and kissed Baby, and hugged little Ruth in her arms! 'O children!' she cried, as soon as she could speak, 'how came you here? How could you frighten us so?'

"Ruth looked puzzled. 'I guess it was the butterfly,' she said: 'it came along, and showed us the way.'

"'Who is this?' asked one of the men.

"'That's Ally,' explained Ruth.

"'Poor boy!' said the Mother. 'I thought even the savages were too tender of their babes to let them thus alone in the forest. We will take him home with us, husband, and cherish him. Perchance his friends may seek him out.'

"But to all their words and kind looks the little Indian was deaf. When they pointed to the setting sun in token that night was near, he pointed to the east as if to say that the same sun would rise again before long. They tried to

entice him with caresses; but he shook himself free, and, signing to some distant part of the wood where his home lay, he emptied the flowers from his quiver, threw back his black hair with a toss, and with a few active bounds disappeared from their sight. Ruth cried after him, 'Ally! Ally!' but it was all in vain. He was gone; and he never came back."

"And what became of Ruth and Baby?" asked Thekla.

"Oh! they went home with their Father and Mother; and good care was taken that they should not stray again. I used to visit them sometimes, and play with their hair and soft cheeks; and I taught them to call the pink blossoms by my name. 'May-flowers' they are termed to this day; and they are such favorites, that I plant immense beds of them in that country every spring, and then people grumble that there are not enough."

"And is that all about the little girls?" persisted Thekla.

"Dear me!" said May, "you are hard to sat-

isfy. No: of course it 's not all. Baby grew up. Some one said she married the Governor. Only think, Baby marry a Governor ! As for little Ruth, she didn't grow up: she went to Heaven instead; and so stayed a child for ever. Nobody knows now where her grave is, excepting me; and every year I plant May-blossoms upon it."

May's voice was a little sad, and her eyes looked sweet and tender.

"How about Algonqua ?" inquired Max, who was rather ashamed of feeling affected.

"He became a great chief," said May, "and lived to be a hundred. I heard that he was buried in a mound out West, over the top of which a railroad now runs. But about that I am not sure: my business is not with the dead, but the living."

And saying this, she rose briskly up. "I meant to have done in just half an hour," she remarked, "and it is nearly an hour and a quarter. I 'll take those moments at once, if you please."

Her manner was so sharp and decided that they did not dare urge her to stay. Max brought the can, and Thekla lighted her to the door. When she had departed with a curt "good-by," they felt perplexed and puzzled.

"She 's very pretty," said they, "but somehow not at all what we expected."



"This is my present," she said.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LITTLE HOUSEKEEPERS.

THE lamb speedily became accustomed to his new home. When Thekla brought him food, he would cuddle close, and lick her fingers, bleating softly. Before long he was grown so tame that, if Max seized his two fore feet and waltzed round the room, he made no objection, but frisked funnily, as if enjoying the joke. Best of all, however, he loved to lie beside Grandfather's chair, within reach of his stroking hand. The old man found continual pleasure in the gentle creature, whose wool was scarcely whiter than his own snowy hair. With the serene faith of old age, he asked no questions as to the new possession, but accepted it calmly and without

wonderment; for Grandfather was getting very old.



"You should have seen Dotty, with her sleeves rolled up, sweeping away for dear life, and ordering 'dear' about."

As for Thekla, she thought there was never a lamb like this. For his sake, she loved all lambs; and often, at her wheel, would sing the "Lamb Song," with which babies are hushed to sleep. It ran something like this:—

" Lambs in the daisies,
Whiter than they ;
So in her snowy bed,
Tossing her golden head,
Frolics my baby, — like lamb at its play.

" See how the little one
Frisks by its dam !
Knowing no harm or fear,
Happy if she is near :
Thus to my bosom clings closely my lamb.

" Now comes the Shepherd,
Counts every one,
Leads to the pastures fair
Where the sweet streamlets are,
Shields from the tempest, and shades from the sun.

" Jesu, the Shepherd dear,
Knoweth his sheep ;
And in His gracious arm,
Safe from all fear and harm,
Keepeth his lammies, and ever will keep."

So, with songs and busy days, the month sped quickly away.

"Oh dear, I wish it were night!" said Max on the morning of the 30th. "April and May were so nice that I'm really in a hurry to have the day go."

"I'm not," replied sensible Thekla. "I like to have to wait a little for pleasant things, because then they last so much longer. And I'm real glad there are so many more Months to come,—six,—no, seven, counting June. Let's work hard to-day, Brother; and then the time will seem short."

Max agreed; and by twelve o'clock the famous spoon, upon which he had been so long engaged, was done. It was cleverly carved for a young workman; and, as there was plenty of time before the Fair, he set to work at once upon a fork to match, and grew so interested that when the sun set he cried out, "Oh dear, it's too bad! The days aren't half long enough."

Thekla laughed, but was too wise, and too tender of Max's feelings, to say, "I told you so," as some little girls would have done. She only

put aside her work, and made haste with the supper, that all might be tidy and in order for the coming guest.

The evenings were still cool enough to make a fire comfortable, and the hearth glowed bright as in winter. But the casement stood open; and, one on each side, the children perched themselves to wait for June. She arrived promptly, the pink sunset glowing behind her figure, as it issued, all clothed in white, from the leafy woods. Max and Thekla flew to meet her. On her head was a wreath of flowering hawthorn. She held up the skirt of her gown filled with strawberries.

"Put in a thumb, and pull out something nice," she said merrily, as she saw them coming.

Both thumbs and fingers were soon red as cherries; for all the time June told her tale they kept going in and out of the fragrant, fascinating lap, and conveying red, delicious mouthfuls to the little lips dyed deep with juicy stains. It was wonderful how the children took to June. It seemed as if they could not get close enough.

They lay on her lap, put their arms about her neck, kissed and played with her hands, were not one bit afraid of her;—and she evidently was used to and liked it, for she only smiled when they did so. This was her story:—

“Last year I had to take a long ride over the Desert, and it was extremely hot. So, as soon as was possible I came away, and went to a place among the hills, to cool off. A very nice, old-fashioned, little place it is. People from the city go there in the summer; and this time, as it happened, they were earlier than usual.

“I love children very much, so I soon got acquainted with all in the village. There were ever so many of them. Some, in fine ruffled frocks, were thin and white, and had blue circles round their eyes. That was because they had been taken to parties in the winter till they were almost dead. And some were all worried out with going to school, and had round shoulders and tired faces. And a few were dear natural little boys and girls, with lips and cheeks the right color, and plenty of clean common clothes

to romp in. I loved all of them, and they me; but these last loved me best. We used to spend whole days out-doors together, playing 'I spy' and 'hide-and-seek' in the bushes. As a general thing, they were pretty good. There was an Anna Maria, to be sure, who slapped her little sister now and then; and one boy named Johnny who *would* climb trees after the robins' nests: so that I was forced at last to push him off a bough and sprain his ankle, to make him let them alone. But, on the whole, I was well satisfied with them. And my prime favorite — the roundest, jolliest, nicest, prettiest of all — was little Dotty Dexter.

"Dotty was six years old, the dearest, cunningest mite of a romp you ever saw, and at the same time a born housewife. All her life it had been so. When two years old, she used to take her small apron and trot round the nursery rubbing the furniture clean, as she had seen nurse do. She could only reach to the seats of the chairs, and about half way up the legs of the tables; but so far she always made

them shine till you could almost see your face in them.

"Dotty had an admirer. He was one year older than she, and his name was Willy Pringle. She loved him very much, partly because he had a jacket with two pockets, and gilt buttons down the front, and partly because when his mamma gave him any gum-drops he always brought her half of them to suck. So when he asked, 'Would she be his little wife?' she said she would.

"Down the village street stood a queer little house, which nobody lived in. Once it had been painted brown; but the paint had rubbed off, and now it was all yellow and spotty. The door wasn't locked, because doors never were locked in that place; and one day Willy and Dotty opened it, and strayed in to take a look.

"It was a most beautiful house. There was a hall, with an upstairs and a downstairs to it. The upstairs went to the bed-rooms, and the downstairs to the cellar. There were two rooms,—a parlor and a kitchen; and two bed-

rooms, and the cellar: that made five. There was a stove in the kitchen, with real holes in the top, and a pipe. It was rather rusty, but a delightful stove notwithstanding. In the parlor was a chair and a stool and another chair, all three quite ragged; and upstairs, on one of the window-sills, stood a long row of bottles. ‘Hair Dye’ was written on the outside of them; and they smelt dusty, when you put them to your nose. That was all the furniture; except some pieces of plaster, which had fallen down from the ceiling.

“Dotty and Willy trotted over the place, hand in hand. Their conclusion was that there never was such a nice house before for two young people to go to housekeeping in.

“‘We ’ll call it ours, you know,’ said Dotty, ‘and play we live in it. Only we won’t stay at night, ’cause Mamma says mice always get into old houses. And it scares me dreadful when I hear them scratch.’

“‘Pooh!’ said Willy, ‘to be afraid of mice! But then you ’re a girl, Dotty, so it ’s no wonder. Ain’t it a nice house? We ’ll stay here

'most all the time, won't we? Only sometimes we'll let the others come and play with us.'

"' Sometimes,' replied Mistress Dotty, with an air of experience,—' sometimes; but not *fekently*, 'cause visitors is a bother! I heard Ma say so. Now the first thing we've got to do is to clear up. Where can we get a broom, dear?'

"Dotty said 'dear,' because Mamma sometimes called Papa so.

"I guess Miss Hepsy would lend us one," answered Willy.

"Miss Hepsy was a kind old lady who lived next door. When she heard who her new neighbors were, she laughed till her sides ached, and lent them the broom with all the good-will in the world.

"Keep it as long as you like," she said: "you'll find it handy."

"You should have seen Dotty, with her sleeves rolled up, sweeping away for dear life, and ordering 'Dear' about as if she had been ninety years old! When the sweeping was finished, they got some water in a 'Hair Dye'

bottle, and washed the stairs with Dotty's pocket-handkerchief. That was fine fun!

"Course we must have a door-plate, dear!" said the indefatigable Dotty, this being done, 'else folks won't know who to ask the girl is at home.'

"So Willy cut a square piece of brown paper, and printed on it in big letters, 'Dotty and Willy Pringle, Esquire.' After which, they stuck it on the door with a bit of glue which he fortunately had in his pocket. He had put it there to chew!"

Here June stopped, for Max and Thekla were in fits of amusement. June laughed herself, and showed a dimple in each cheek, and one in her chin.

"I don't wonder you think it funny," she said. "I was holding my sides all the time myself. It was too comical,—the wise air of that mite of a Dotty, and the way she made Willy mind her.

"When the little people went home to dinner, and told their intentions about the house, none of the older folks made any objections. Dotty's

Mamma walked down to make sure there was nothing dangerous about the premises; and, as all seemed safe, leave was given them to play there as much as they liked.

"It was wonderful to see how much they managed to accomplish. All the village took an interest, and the good wives hunted their garrets over for old duds to furnish out the little cottage. Before long there were chairs and tables enough to supply quite a large company; and so much cracked crockery that, burning to use it, Dotty and Willy were constantly going about and begging for something, to drink from their cups and pitchers. The Mammas finding this out, and thinking a lunch would be a good thing for such busy workers, gave the milkman a standing order to leave a pint of milk every day at the door. Never was any thing so charming. He would stop and ring his bell just as he did at the grown-up houses, and Dotty — always keeping him waiting a moment for dignity's sake — would march out with her tin measure in her hand. I suspect the milkman enjoyed the joke

as much as anybody, for I never in my life did see such big pints as he used to pour out of his shining dipper.

"The whole house was scrubbed every day. Not because it was dirty, but because Dotty loved to do it. They lived principally in the kitchen, because the village custom was to use parlors very little, and keep them very dark; but now and then, when Dotty opened a chink of the parlor shutters and let in a little light, you perceived that the apartment was a magnificent one. There was a table with two daguerro-types open upon it, and a copy of 'Doddridge's Rise and Progress,' put there, as Dotty said, to look 'littery.' The chimney held a great bunch of asparagus feathers; and on the shelf, on the sill, everywhere, were flowers,—in mugs, bottles, pitchers, glasses. Peonies, dandelions, roses,—it didn't matter which: all was fish that came to Dotty's net.

It was a grand sight to see the family at dinner,—Mrs. Dotty, Mr. Willy, and a doll named Araminta. The meal was simple. Sometimes it

was bread and butter, sometimes only fennel; but always there was milk. The finest table-manners were practised. Araminta was never allowed to eat with her knife, or put her elbows on the table; and once, when she attempted to tilt her chair on two legs she was very severely punished. Oh! I assure you, Dotty was a disciplinarian.

"I don't think any palace that ever was built gave half so much pleasure as that little house. The very crown of all, however, was the tea-party, given just before they came away. I wasn't there myself, of course; but September told me about it. She was invited.

"Willy's Papa had been greatly amused at the whole thing, and he helped. Two long evenings he spent in getting up the cards of invitation. They were neatly printed, and bore the following words:—

"Mr. and Mrs. William Pringle
request the pleasure of your company to tea
on Wednesday afternoon, at five o'clock,
at their residence, No. 17 Elm Street.

R. S. V. P.'

"All the little boys and girls were immensely excited when these cards came, and especially at 'R. S. V. P.' They were anxious to know what it could mean. Some one told them, 'Real Sweet Violet Powder;' but the children said, 'Pshaw! that was too silly.'"

"What did it really mean?" asked Thekla.

"I'm sure I don't know," said June. "How should I? I never go to parties. Perhaps the last word is 'Pringle:' that begins with 'P.' But, whatever it means, it was nice to have them printed there, because it set the little folks guessing, and doubled the fun. Meantime, Dotty and Willy were hard at work getting ready for the grand affair. It took almost a week, I can tell you."

"Every thing had to be scrubbed, of course. All the windows were washed, and the furniture dusted. The neighbors sent contributions of cake and biscuit; and, to make the feast more imposing, Mr. Pringle ordered up a big basket of peaches.

"When the time came, Dotty and Willy, in

their best clothes, sat on two chairs waiting for the company, and looking very solemn. Every one had to rap on the door; and Dotty, on opening it, would say, ‘Please s’cuse me for coming my own self, ’cause I’ve sent my girl out on a *current*,’ which was very impressive.

“ Then the little visitors would come into the parlor, and sit down. They all tried to be very grave and grown-up; but it didn’t last long with most of them. Dotty’s dignity, however, held out to the end. When she sat at the head of the table pouring tea (out of the pitcher), she was a sight to behold.

“ ‘Mr. Pringle,’ she would say, ‘please *distibit* those peaches. You ain’t so polite to the company as I could wish.’

“ The very next day after this happy one, Dotty’s Mamma and Papa went away, and Dotty with them. All the good times were over. She sat on her nurse’s lap and sobbed, as they drove down the street. When they passed ‘No. 17,’ it seemed as if her heart must break. As for poor Willy, he felt as badly as she; but he

wouldn't cry, because he was a man and the head of a family. When the carriage was quite out of sight, he walked down to the house to see if it would make him feel better. But it looked empty and lonely, with no cunning little figure trotting about, broom in hand; and was altogether so dismal that the poor little man couldn't bear it, and, as there was nobody to see, he just sat down and cried as hard as Dotty herself. Next day he, too, went away. And since then nobody has lived in the cottage; but the neighbors still tell of the droll little housekeepers, and the nice times they had there."

"Oh, don't go! Tell us another," pleaded the children, as June rose gently from her seat.

"Look at the clock!" remonstrated June.

Sure enough, it was half-past nine. How the hours had flown!

"I'm nothing unless I have plenty of roses," she went on; "and so far I've only this handful to begin with. The rest are in your can, you know."

"Take some more, — pray do!" entreated

Max. "Never mind if the other Months are a little short."

"But that wouldn't be fair," replied June. "Every one has a right to his own. Good-by, Max. Good-by, Thekla darling. Next year, if all is well, I'll see you again."

So saying, she glided from the door.



"As there was nobody to see, he just sat down and cried as hard as Dotty herself!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAST OF THE FAIRIES.

THAT visit of June's was a bright spot, and the month that followed a lovely one. Never had grass been greener or wild flowers bloomed so thickly. The trees were full of birds, which sang all day, and all night too, as if too happy to sleep. Fragrant winds seemed to woo the children out of doors. They passed half their time in the wood; and often while wandering about, fancying that they caught the gleam of June's smile or saw the skirt of her robe vanishing among the trees, they would pursue; and, though nothing but a dewdrop or a bough of white blossoms waving to and fro could be found, still the sense of her presence never left

them, and it made the sweetness of the season still more sweet.

Wherever Thekla went, her pets went too.



“The children loved us, and listened for our voices. Their bright, untired eyes could perceive us, as we swung from the blue-bells.”

The little maid in gray kirtle and scarlet jacket, with a yellow chicken on each shoulder, and the white lamb following close behind, rubbing its cold, soft nose against her hand, made so pretty a picture that it seemed sad it should ever grow old or in any way alter. But little girls cannot always be little, nor is it desirable they should; and, for the lamb, practical Thekla had no notion of keeping him for a useless plaything. Already she had begun to talk of the stockings Grand-father was to have out of the first shearing when lammie should become a sheep, and the comforter which she would knit for Max to tie about his throat on cold days. And, as if to please her, lammie made haste to be big.

As the days came one by one, long and beautiful, it seemed hard to let them go. "Oh, not yet!" the children cried each night to the sun as he dipped below the horizon; and each night he tarried longer and longer, as if in answer to their prayer. But in the end he always had to go. And so, too, the sweet Month finally said

"Good-by;" and it was time for July to make her appearance.

The few sticks which boiled the porridge had blackened into ashes upon the hearth, and the children sat hand in hand in the open doorway. A breeze was stirring. Sweet smells came on its wings from the woods. It was the warmest evening yet, and the first upon which the fire had been suffered to go utterly out.

By and by they saw July coming. She had taken off her hat for coolness, and was fanning herself with the broad brim. It was made of the leaves of some foreign tree, and shaded her bright, sunburnt face like a green roof. Thekla privately thought that it must have been taken off a good many times before, or July wouldn't be so brown.

"Well, I'm glad to get here," she said, seating herself and flapping the hat to and fro: "it's almost too warm for long walks. Not that I can afford to sit still in any case: I'm too active

a person for that. But just here it is really quite comfortable. I supposed I should find you all burnt up, like the people outside there," pointing to the wood; "so by way of a present I brought these," and she produced two palm-leaf fans.

The children were delighted. They had never seen any before. "Are they really made of leaves?" they asked.

"To be sure," said July. "How odd that you shouldn't know! Why, over in America every man, woman, and child has one. They are plenty as blackberries,—babies cry for them. And, speaking of blackberries, here is a pocketful I picked as I came along. You can be eating them to keep yourselves from getting impatient; for I'm all out of breath, and can't begin yet." Saying which, she turned the pocket inside out on the door-step.

This was good fun. Blackberries grew too far off to be things of every day, and these were the first of the season. One after another, the

shining black beads disappeared down the little throats. By the time the last had vanished, July was rested, and ready to commence.

"You must know," she said, "that way up North, in a region which I sometimes visit, are two beautiful peaks called the 'Marble Mountains.' No mountains in all the country are so beautiful as they. When the full noon smites them, they gleam like snow; and their glistening seams give out sharp glints, between which lie shadows of the purest, softest gray. But at sunset and sunrise they are all lovely pink, like roses; and so enchanting do they look, that miles and miles away the children watch them, and fancy the fairies must live there."

"It is a wild spot, and few people have ever reached it. Excepting me: I go everywhere. But for a long time I contented myself with hasty calls, and did not force my way to the heart of the place, where the thick shadows lie. Last year, however, I resolved to make more thorough

work. Slowly and carefully I toiled through the dense brushwood and the deep glens; and at last, in the very loneliest recess of the mountain, I came upon — what do you think? — a fairy! The little children far away had been right in their guess, you see.

“It was Midsummer-eve, the fairies’ own day; and he was celebrating it with an out-door tea. His seat was in the middle of a circle of vivid green grass, the kind that once went by the name of a ‘fairy ring.’ He was quite an old fairy. It is difficult to determine about ages, but I saw that at a glance. Beside him stood an immense toadstool, upon which was placed his supper of honey posset; but he didn’t seem to have much appetite, — in fact, he was dreadfully out of spirits, as I found after we had talked a little while.

“‘I am the last of the little men in green,’ he said, glancing down at his clothes, which were indeed of a delicate duckweed tint.

'Many, many centuries have I lived on earth; in fact, I may say that you see before you that "oldest inhabitant" so frequently referred to in the newspapers. My youth was a happy one,—how happy I do not now like to recall. We fairies then were the great folk in England. Perhaps you have heard of England ?'

"I mentioned that I had, and was in the habit of making a visit there every year.

"This pleased the fairy. 'Ah! that *is* a country,' he went on. 'Such moonlight! such woods ! such *delightful* society ! Sherwood Forest now ! Many and many a night have I danced and made merry there in the days of bold Robin Hood ! But that was long, long ago.'

"When we little people heard that a ship was to cross the sea, and bring a colony of English to settle on these shores, we held a meeting to consider what was to be done. There were children among the colonists. Now it is a fixed

rule among us that, wherever children go, fairies must go too.

"It was a sad and painful thing to leave that dear land where we were honored and believed in, but we are not of the kind who shrink from the call of duty. I was among the earliest volunteers. Ah! if I had known,' said the fairy, shaking his head, 'had guessed, half what lay before us, I should never have "signified in the usual manner"—by raising my right wing—a readiness to go. But I was young in those days,—young and ardent; and my soul was full of courage and adventure.

"Of the voyage I will not trust myself to speak. None of the remedies — blue-pill, quassia, chloroform, ice on the spine, mustard on the stomach, or keeping-your-eye-immovably-on-a-fixed-object — had been invented, and we suffered agonies. When the ship touched Plymouth Rock, I could hardly drag myself ashore.

"It was cold, very cold. No going out of doors was possible. We huddled together in the tents, keeping in dark corners, and as much out of sight as we could, for fear of getting our little friends into trouble. For these colonists were a severe folk; and children *will* talk, you know. And if ever we crept out to crack a tiny joke with one, tell a story to another, or sing a snatch in the ear of the cooing baby, some chatterer was sure to spill and bubble over with fun and merriment; and then, lo! and behold, there would be a catechism lesson to learn, or some stern reproof, which sent us cowering into our retreats to weep over our poor little sobbing friends. So in time the children learned to keep all the secrets we whispered them to themselves; and that did not please us either, for we love jests and laughter and outspoken words.

"Well, those hard times after a while passed by. The people grew and increased. They conquered the wilderness, and built many towns.

A different order of things sprang up. It was then that we fairies reaped the reward of our self-devotion. No longer was it considered sinful to spin fanciful tales, or sing funny rhymes. The children loved us, and listened for our voices. Their bright, untired eyes could perceive us, as we swung from the blue-bells, or pelted each other with the brown pollen of tiger-lilies; and they rejoiced with us. Babies crooned in the sun as we rocked their cradles. And we played no tricks,' declared the fairy, growing excited: 'we were a rational and well-conducted people. Whether the catechism and godly talk we had heard in the tents had sobered us, I know not; but certain it is we had lost some of our mischief. No longer did we tweak the noses of ploughboys, or incite the cow to kick over the milking-pail. No! On the contrary, we were the helpers in all useful work. We made the butter come; we swept the rooms, and straightened the shelves of good housewives; and were a general blessing to the land.

"Alas! what a poor return have we met for all this! For a new age has dawned, and another kind of child,—a child who reasons and thinks, and studies arithmetic and the science of objects. We have lost our worshippers. Even the babies sprawling in their mothers' laps know better than to believe in us. Long we strove,—we practised all our lore, traced our rings in the grass, dropped fairy favors into little stockings, made bluebottle-fly and dragonfly our messengers,—but all in vain. The wish to see was wanting.

"Did we spin for hours, and overlay the grass with a silken carpet to dazzle and enchant early peepers? Nobody cared a button; and some parent would be heard explaining, "It is nothing but cobweb, my dear. Come to the library after breakfast, and I'll read you about it in a book of Natural History." 'Yes,' said the fairy, bitterly, 'it had come to that,—the book of Natural History instead of the "Fairy

Book"! Or did we spread a tiny table like this, with strawberries ranged in row, and leave it in the path where little travellers were wont to pass, no one heeded it. "Only an old toadstool!" they would cry, and kick it aside with their copper-toed boots. Ah! it was enough to break a fairy's heart!

"When we lit our tapers, and went out in procession in the evening, we were called fireflies! Our pretty songs, as we rocked in the boughs, were ascribed to the wind; and "Hadn't baby better have on something warmer, dear?" Our fairy favors were treated with scorn. Once I dropped a tester into a little girl's shoe, as she paddled in the brook. Was she pleased? Not at all! "Here's an ugly yellow leaf in my boot," she said; and she plucked it out and threw it away.

"What was left for us to do, our occupation gone? Nothing! We resigned ourselves to the inevitable. One by one we deserted the

haunts, which alas! knew us no more, and retreated farther and farther from the abodes of men. At last we chose this Marble Mountain for our home. Here long years we dwelt, a numerous colony; for other fugitives joined our retreat. The Banshee inhabited for some months a cave upon that western slope; but her perpetual lamentations made us sad, and at last we united in a remonstrance; and she left for the Ojibeway Country, where she still resides. Bogey too — harmless, though black — was for long our hewer of wood and drawer of water. He now sleeps yonder, under the greenwood tree; while beside him slumbers that forgotten worthy, "The man who lived in the chimney," once the terror of refractory nurseries. Bug-a-boo also joined our band for a while, but deserted us for a situation among the Ku-Klux. Even Santa Claus talked at one time of uniting himself to our number, but he thought better of it. I conclude,' said the fairy, ironically, 'that mankind

found out some way of turning him to account, and making him useful, or he would certainly have come.

"One by one our once merry company drooped and faded. The monotonous life of this place was too sad for them, used as they were to sunny nurseries, gay flower-beds, and the world of fun. The graves of my brothers and sisters lie about me, and here in the midst of them I dwell. It is years since I have left my hermitage or seen a child;—in fact, I don't, believe there is such a thing as a real child left in the land.'

"So saying, the fairy ended his tale with a profound sigh. He pulled his pointed cap (which was exactly like a little red extinguisher) over his eyes, and to all my questions replied not another word. And so I left him sitting alone and silent. Whether he still lives I do not know. His poor body was thin as a grass-hopper's; and I suspect when I visit the moun-

tains again this year, I shall find his little skeleton hidden away under a bunch-berry or a blade of grass."

"Oh," sighed Thekla, "how lovely! That was the best yet."



"So saying, the fairy ended his tale with a profound sigh."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STORY OF A LITTLE SPARK.

"I WONDER what kind of a story we shall have to-night," said Max, as they sat on the door-step waiting for August to appear.

Thekla, who had been ironing, looked very pale and complained of a headache. The day had been hot; no cool wind had come with evening to refresh them ; the leaves hung motionless. Far, far away the tinkle of a bell was audible, from some animal astray in the Forest.

"I don't recollect much about August," said Thekla, languidly. "Was she pretty?"

"I don't either," answered Max. "There was such a confusion that night the Months came, that I got them all mixed up in my mind. I

think, though, she wasn't a she : she was a man."



"For only think what that woman had on her hands : . . . she hitched the horse, . . . snatched up her babies, and a poor old man who lived with them."

"Oh, no!" cried Thekla, "August never could be a man, Max. What are you talking about? I remember now: she was sweet and brown, and held a sheaf of wheat in her hand."

"No," persisted Max: "that was September or October,—I forget which. Depend upon it, August will turn out to be a gentleman."

"And depend upon it, she is a lady!"

Thekla's voice was positively fretful. Max was vexed for a moment; then, remembering how patiently her little hands had worked all the morning smoothing shirts and stockings for him, his heart grew tender. Instead of going on with the dispute, he moved his seat closer; and, pulling the flushed cheek down on his shoulder, began to cool it with gentle wavings of his palm-leaf fan. It was extremely pleasant and comfortable. Thekla closed her eyes: then she began to think of a long procession of sheep jumping over a fence; and to count them one by one, first a fleecy head, then a woolly tail;—and next she was fast asleep. After which, she

waked up suddenly; for Max gave a sudden jump, and behold, August was close to them.

Thekla was wrong, after all; and Max right. For there stood a handsome young man, with quick, fiery eyes and a bronzed face, round which floated locks of auburn hair. He seemed very hot, and was wiping the drops from his forehead; but, for all his good looks, there was something about him from which the children rather shrank.

Yet he did not appear a bad fellow either; for he made himself at home on the door-step, and borrowed the palm-leaf as if he had been one of the family. Any thing so curious or beautiful as his dress the children had never before seen. It was a loosely fitting garment of vivid green, thickly wrought all over with a pattern in which ferns and vines and dense, bright leaves were interlaced and twisted in the most wonderful manner. A chain of fire-flies swung about his neck like a collar, his hat was looped up at the side with a glow-worm of immense size, which,

whenever he moved, glanced and gleamed in a sudden and bewildering way.

"What's the matter?" he asked Thekla, in rather an abrupt tone.

"I'm a little tired, sir," she replied timidly.

"Oh, ho!" said August. "I've caught you. You've been working at something! I never mistake the signs. Now see here,—that's a thing I don't allow: it's against my rules. You may thank your luck I was not here. Whenever I find children doing it, I give them a rap of some sort to remember me by. So recollect that, and look out."

Thekla shrank back, half alarmed; for, though August laughed, his voice was menacing. And she reflected with satisfaction that the big wash just concluded would be the last before winter. For you must know that, in the Black Forest, Monday is not the terrible occasion it is with us, and "washing days" come round a great way apart, once in three months perhaps, or something like that.

"I'm going to tell you," said August, after sitting some time in silence, with his eyes glaring at vacancy,— "I'm going to tell you the history of a spark of fire.

"It was born in a hunter's pipe. When he had done smoking, he shook out the hot ashes, and went his way. Most of them died in silence; but one, my little spark, fell upon a brown leaf in a lonely place.

"It was very small, and rather dull. None of its friends and relations supposed it would live long enough to attain to honor and distinction. But I saw it when it fell, and foretold for it a career; in fact, I may say assisted it somewhat in its efforts to get on.

"It had been a dry spring. All the rills and watercourses in the woods were exhausted; and where once their bubbling voices sounded, thirsty, white pebbles lay in the sun. The world was like a tinder-box. Slowly and scantily the sap coursed in the veins of the trees; the vines which clothed them were crisped with heat. The little spark had fallen at a fortunate moment.

"It was very little: a spoonful of water could have quenched it. But it had a soul which longed to expand and soar, and now its chance was come. Steadily and stealthily it ran to and fro: first a twig, then a bough, then a bush, received it. Day by day, day by day,—now it was a carpet, wonderful and red, glinting the ground; then a fountain, which threw sparks like spray into the air; next it climbed the trees, and hissed and shouted aloft with an angry voice; then, writhing like an angry snake, it twisted its folds round a fallen trunk, and strangled it in fierce embrace. When a week had gone by, the little spark gathered up its force, and prepared to travel. It had grown terrible. Whole rivers of water would not quench it now.

"Terrible, but full of splendor! Its crested neck reared above the forest; like a volcano its column of flame shot into the air; like an avalanche it poured in fiery flood over whole acres. Strange, fantastic patterns it traced as it went along, shapes of leaf and bough and glowing

vine; but there was none to admire them. The breath of its fury was too hot for that!

"And now the woods were passed, and it reached the open country. You should have seen the fences rush like blazing serpents to carry the tidings to the barns! And the barns lit up in welcome, and called upon the dwellings to do the same! Out rushed the men, cows lowed, horses tied to burning mangers cried for aid with terrible voices, women and children wept, the labor of years vanished in an hour! Ah! those were glorious times for the little spark!

"I was there of course, had been there all along. Every mile of the burning lightened my work for another year, and I patted the spark on its back and urged it to speed. It was proud at heart now. 'I will burn,' it said, 'till I dry up the great sea itself.' It raised its head and defied heaven. But I saw clouds coming, dark clouds,—storm-clouds, fatal to fire,—and I cheered it on.

"We were drawing near a clearing. I had been there before,—a neat, thriving place where all was in order, and children played beside the door. I recollect one little girl with a rosy face, and for the first time felt the stirrings of pity round my heart. So, holding back my companion a moment, I shouted, from amid the smoke, a warning to the sleepers within,—a warning in an awful voice.

"In a minute they were awake, and out they poured. It was pitiful to see. Calmly and without fear they had lain down to sleep, thinking us miles away. And here we were at the very door! The farmer was not at home, but his wife was. And all I can say is," remarked August, admiringly, "if he's any more of a man than she, it would be worth people's while to go a good way to look at him.

"For only think what that woman had on her hands. Behind, around, all was fire. Sparks were falling upon the barn, the sheep in the fields were blazing and dying in dreadful heaps.

Her little children screamed and clung to her. But she never faltered. With quick, nervous fingers she hitched the horse to the wagon, flung in some clothes, some blankets, whatever she could find soonest, snatched up her babies, and a poor old man who lived with them, and lashed the horse to a gallop. Before them was the open road, behind was death!

"The fire had struggled from my grasp. Furious at the sight of his escaping prey, he flew forward. With rapid clutch he seized the dwelling, the farm buildings, overtook the frantic cattle, hurled them this way and that, and took the track of the retreating wagon. High in air his dreadful eye glared after the fugitives; and myriad fiery tongues licked right and left, the avenues of escape.

"But the woman never blenched! Once she stopped,—actually stopped,—though the hot breath was on her cheeks! It was at the sound of children's voices crying aloud. There were five of them, alone in a house, with none to help. She hurried them into the wagon. There was

no room for her now, so she stood upon the step as she drove, and lashed the horse forward. On! on! We were drawing very near.

"So near that our hands could reach them. One spark darted upon the clothing: it smouldered, then flamed. The children screamed; but the mother seized the garment and threw it from the wagon, where it blazed harmlessly. And still the horse galloped, and still the race continued.

"At last they could go no farther. The fire had outrun them: it was before, beside, behind,—it left no pathway anywhere. The mother did not give up. She stopped the horse, crowded the little ones under the wagon, hung blankets over the sides to keep off the heat, and sitting in the midst, the baby in her lap, waited her fate.

"The courage of that woman," said August, clearing his throat, "I never saw equalled. It wasn't in my power to help her much. Fire is a bad master, people say; and I was beginning to find it true. It mastered me. But one thing I did: I stood by the horse's head, and held him tight so that he could not stir, even when the

fiery rain fell fast and singed his hair. It was the only chance for the poor children. And, being there, of course I could see all that went on under the wagon.

"They were wonderfully patient. 'Mother, are we going to burn up?' I heard one child say. But the poor mother did not answer, she only gave a sob. None of them cried or screamed; but they just sat cuddled up together, and were very quiet. Once the smallest one asked for a drink of water! I declare, that made me feel bad!"

"Just then I heard a sound above the roar of the flames which caused me to prick up my ears; for I knew it's meaning, and I said, 'Ah, ha! Master Spark, look out for yourself!' And pretty soon a drop fell on my nose. It felt like ice, I was so hot. And next the flames began to hiss and spit, for more drops were falling; and then they made a great swoop at the wagon, but I was beforehand with them there."

"'Hands off!' I said, and the rain chuckled as it heard me. The fire raged; but it was no use.

Guggle, guggle, spit, spit,—the blessed shower continued to fall; and at last its roar was louder than the flames had ever been. The spark had met its match.

"Ah! what a glad sound that was to the group under the wagon! The children laughed for joy. They crept out to catch the cool flood upon their parched limbs. But the mother did not stir. Her face was hidden in her hands. I think she was praying.

"Hours and hours did the rain continue. It fought the fire as mortal foes fight, it wrestled and beat it down, and tore and trampled it under foot. But to the last the eye of the little spark gleamed red and vengeful, and only when it was cold in death did its fury go out. Water had won the day."

Max and Thekla had been too horrified to move during this story, which August recited rapidly and with great excitement. Tears were running down Thekla's face when he ended. "And the children," said she, "what did they do?"

"Oh, they got along somehow!" said August indifferently, as if ashamed of his emotion. "People took them in, and after a while they built another house. One little boy had intermittent fever, but that wasn't much. I shall see them again in a few days, probably; and one thing I've made up my mind to,—that woman's corn is to ripen this year, if nobody's else does."

So saying, August arose, and shook himself, the fire-flies round his neck gleaming like a blazing string as he did so.

"I must be off!" he said. "Where are my moments?"

Max brought them. So absorbed had he and Thekla been in the peril of the tale, that neither of them noticed that August had produced no gift. He, however, was less forgetful.

"Here's your present, you know," he said with a malicious smile, just as he turned to go. "Take care! I have to open the bottle first. Crick, crack!—here it goes." As he uttered these words, he pulled out a cork, and made a kind of toss. A buzzing sound was heard:

something small and winged flew out, and filled the air. August gave a loud laugh, and vanished in the Forest.

Max and Thekla stood staring after him for a moment, stupefied with astonishment. Then they began to dance up and down, and slap themselves right and left with countenances as red as fire. Curious lumps were forming on their faces and hands. You see mosquitoes are unknown in the Black Forest, and August's gift was a couple of dozen — very lively ones — from the Jersey Flats!



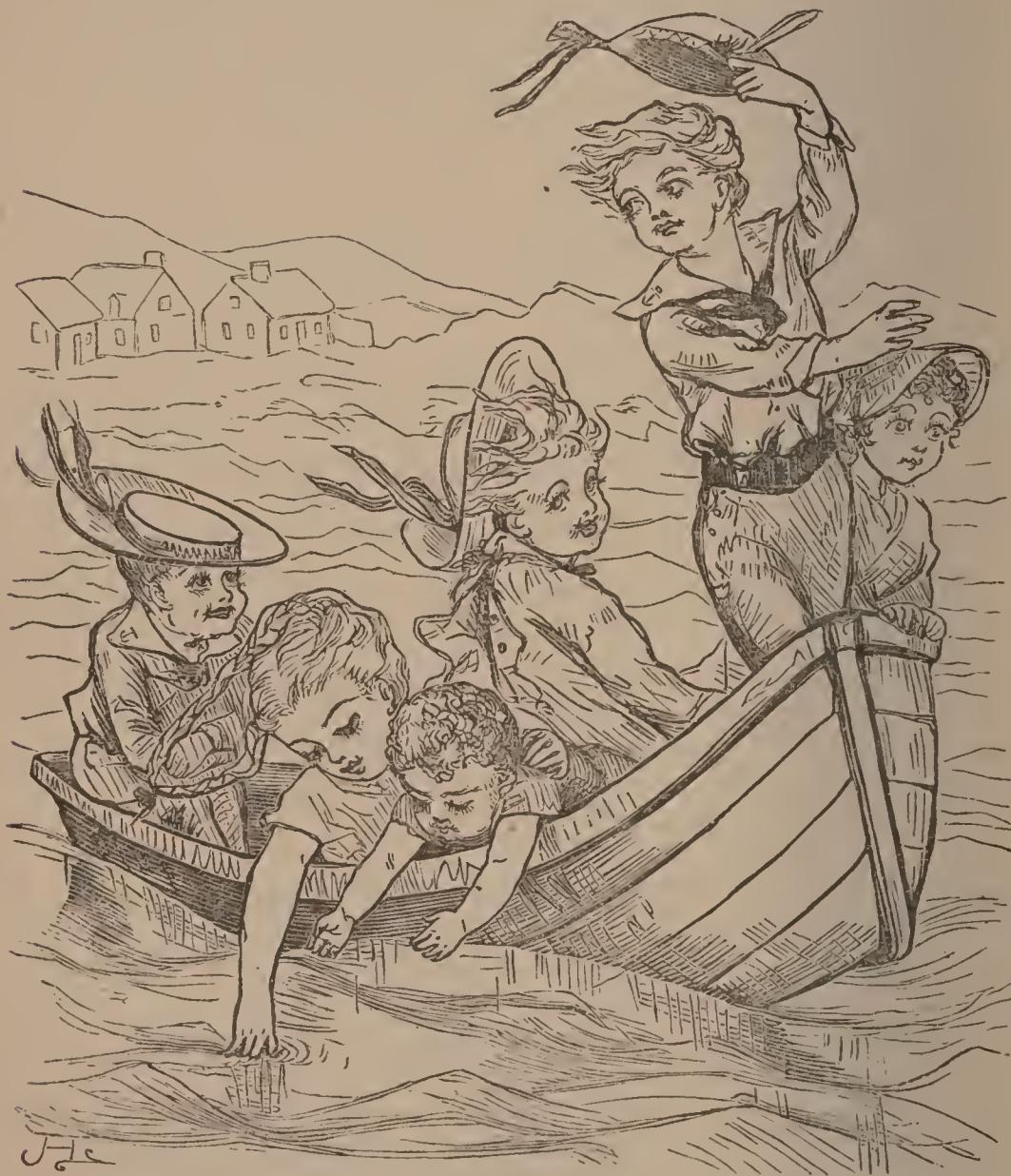
Max "moved his seat closer; and, pulling the flushed cheek down on his shoulder, began to cool it with gentle wavings of his palm-leaf fan."

CHAPTER IX.

THE DESERT ISLAND.

THE month that followed was a sorry one. Day after day rose dry and burning: no cool winds fanned the breathless nights, no rain fell. The poor children had headache, they felt limp and weary all over; and yet each morning brought the same hard work which must be done, whether or no. And sleep was rendered almost impossible by the mosquitoes, who seemed to possess stings and wings and buzzes such as never mosquitoes boasted before. Whenever poor Thekla dropped into a nap, after hours of tossing, in the stifling loft which served her for bedroom, "Spizz-z-z-z" the teasing little trumpets would begin; and immediately she would be

broad awake again, ready to cry with fatigue, and dealing blows right and left, as if battling



"‘O Reggy!’ she cried, ‘the boat is running away with us! — ‘Don’t cry, Emyny!’ he exclaimed. ‘It isn’t our fault, so nobody will scold us. And now we’ll see the Island. Just think what fun!’ and the whole boat-load shouted, and clapped their hands.”

with an unseen foe. Max spent hours in hunting them; but the mosquitoes hid themselves cunningly, and could seldom be found. Never was such a tiresome, unpleasant August! Before the last day came, our children quite hated him, in spite of his beautiful face and rich, strange garments. He was a cruel, bad fellow, they said;—they never wished to see him again.

That closing evening was hot as ever. The sun went down red and lurid. As the children sat side by side in the door-way, watching the long level beams stream through the Forest, Max caught a distant glimpse of August, pausing and glancing back, as for a last view of the cottage. Max touched Thekla's arm to make her look. At that moment August raised his hand as in mocking gesture of farewell, and turned to go. Another figure met his as he moved away. They stopped, embraced, then August vanished; and with slow, gliding steps his companion advanced. It was September, — a noble, matronly form, with dark-flushed, stormy brow, frank smiling

lips, and a sheaf of corn nodding over her shoulder.

Half-fearful and half-glad, the children rose to meet her. A basket was in her hand. Without speaking, she raised the lid, and showed clusters of ripe grapes, purple and white, whose delicious smell filled the air. Then, putting an arm round the brother and sister, she made them sit down on either side of her, and began to dole out the fruit, first to one and then the other; saying nothing, but laughing silently at the eager eyes and mouths. Coolness seemed to come from her garments; and, as if following her track, a fresh wind sprang up in the Forest, and, blowing down upon the group, rustled the leaves, waved Thekla's light hair, and refreshed soul and body like wine.

How comfortable it was ! The children brightened, and began to chirp and twitter like birds. "How good you are to us!" cried Max; while Thekla, holding September's hand, cuddled close to her, and laughed with pleasure.

At last September spoke. Her voice was wonderfully rich and musical, but full of deep, powerful tones, which it was easy to imagine could be heard above the storm, or the loudest thunder. What she said was,—

“Are you better now, dears?”

“Oh! much better,” they told her.

“I met my Brother August as I came along,” continued September; “and I guessed, from what he said, that he had been teasing you. He is a fine fellow, but has a quick, revengeful temper; and he bears a grudge against Max for stealing the moments. But it is too bad to visit it on little Thekla, for she wasn’t to blame.”

“I’d rather share with Max, please,” said Thekla, shaking her head: “we don’t want anything different.”

“That’s a kind little sister,” answered September. “Well, August has made you uncomfortable; but, after all, he hasn’t been so bad, for he might have given you a stroke with the great yellow sun-club he keeps on purpose to use when

he is furiously angry. I can tell you that the people on whom that falls don't forget it in a hurry."

Just then Thekla jumped, and slapped the back of her neck sharply.

"What's the matter?" asked September.

"It's those horrid bugs," explained Max. "August brought them, a whole bottle full, and emptied them all over the house. You can't think how they bite and keep us awake."

"Aha!" laughed September, "that was really too bad! But you shan't be vexed any longer with them, Max. I have something in my pocket which will soon put a stop to their biting."

So saying, she produced a small box, and held it out for the children to look at. It was marked on the lid,—

Early Frost,
or
Mrs. September's Specific for
Mosquitoes, Gnats, and Midges.
(None Genuine without this Label.)

Inside were a quantity of fine glittering pellets like minute hail-stones.

Just then a mosquito lit on Thekla's arm. September laid her finger on her lip, and quick as lightning dashed a pinch of the "Specific" over him. The mosquito fluttered a second, dropped, and lay dead on the ground.

"You see!" said Mrs. September.

Then she rose up, and went into the house, telling the children to sit still and finish the grapes. They heard her moving softly to and fro: after a while she came again, and showed them a handful of spider-web legs and gauzy wings.

"There they are," she said. "Not one of them has escaped. You will sleep soundly to-night, little ones; and I shall give Master August a piece of my mind next time we meet, for playing such naughty tricks."

"And now for my story. By the way, have either of you ever seen the sea?"

"No," replied Thekla. "But the Grandfather did once; and Fritz is there now."

"Fritz? Who is he?"

"Don't you know?" said Max. "That's our big brother, who went away a great while ago, when Thekla and I were very little. He was coming back; but, then, he didn't come. I don't know why. And now the Grandfather says he never will. Is it because the sea is such a pleasant place?"

"I don't know," replied September, dreamily,—"I don't know why he doesn't come. But if you never saw the sea, how in the world am I going to make you understand my story?"

"It's very big,—I know that," ventured Max,—"and all water."

"Did you ever so much as see a lake or a pond?"

"No, only the little spring down there," answered Thekla. "Oh, I know! (joyfully). I can guess! It's a great, great deal of water, thousands and thousands of times more than there is in our rain-water tub!"

"Bless me!" cried September, almost in a pet. "Rain-water tub, indeed! Why, child, if all the tubs in creation were put side by side, they wouldn't make a quarter of a sea! Quarter! they wouldn't make a millionth part! Now listen, while I tell you about it.

"It stretches miles and miles and miles. Get into a boat, and sail for weeks and months, still the shore lies beyond, and still you are at sea!

"It is blue as the sky, and beautiful silver dimples come and go over its face. Or at other times it is green, with waves fifty times the height of your hut, and they rise and fall, and break in foam white as milk. And, when the storms blow, it is black,—black as night,—and the sound of its roaring is like wild beasts over their prey.

"I love the ocean. He and I are friends, though almost every year we have a mighty quarrel, and the world rings with the noise. But afterwards we kiss and make up, and part affectionately.

"And the little ones who live by the sea are my special pets. There are ever so many of them, of all sizes and ages; and our frolics go on from sunrise to sleepy-time."

"What do you play at?" asked Thekla, getting interested.

"All sorts of games. The game of 'Drown' for one,—that is played in the shallows,—and 'Wet my neighbor,' and 'Polliwog.' We build sand-forts; go fishing with crooked pins; rock-by-baby in boats; paddle about with no shoes on. I collect all sorts of pretty shells and weeds for them; and drive schools of bright fish, to plunge and jump where they can be seen. On Sunday there are Sunday schools, and they jump to a tune in short metre. Oh, there is no end to the amusing things we do, when we get together! They think there is nobody like me, especially the Brown children."

"The Brown children?" said Max, inquiringly.

"Yes: the ones who were carried off in the boat, you know."

"But we never heard about them before," remonstrated little Thekla.

"Why, so you didn't!" cried September, recollecting herself. "Well, you shall now; for that's the very story I'm going to tell you.

"There are a good many of the Browns; and they live at a very nice place on the sea-coast, called 'Timber Cove.' Plenty of rocks and sand and surf there; and these jolly little Browns — prime pets of mine — are as fond of the ocean as a nest full of young sea-mews. They were always on the beach; playing plays, and 'making-believe' about going to sea, — especially about going to an Island, which was one of their favorite plans.

"I've seen Islands enough in my time, and don't think much of them," went on September. "But there was a book in the nursery, which the Brown children were for ever poring over, and which was all about an Island. I don't recollect its name; in fact, I don't know how to read myself, having always lived outdoors, and hated

schools. But what little I picked up about it sounded particularly silly; and as for the Island, it was like none I ever saw or heard of. The little Browns, however, believed in it as if it had been law and gospel; and were perfectly sure if they could only just get out to a certain Island, which lay just in sight from the shore, that there they should find all the things spoken of in the book,—tigers and serpents and buffaloes, and what not!

"One afternoon they were playing in a boat, which was drawn up on the beach,—Reggy and Alice and Emmy, and Jack and Nora, and little Tom, the baby. I was busy that day. The Sea and I had engaged in a wrangle, and both our tempers were getting up. I forgot to look after my pets, and one of the watch-dogs of Ocean seized the opportunity to creep up and do them a mischief. These dogs are called 'Tides,' because they are generally kept *tied* up, out of harm's way; but now and then the wild things break loose, and then there is a fine to-do.

"The Tide was cunning. Silently he prowled about, drawing nearer and nearer, till at last he fastened his teeth in the bow of the boat. Then he pulled and pulled,—very gently, so as not to alarm the children; and little by little dragged them away from the shore into the deeper water. Next he gave a shove, and floated them off completely. And then, beside himself with joy and frolic, he rushed for the beach; and, plunging and roaring, began to turn summersaults on the sand, delighted at his success. The little ones played on, unconscious.

"At last Emmy looked up, and gave a scream.

"'O Reggy!' she cried, 'the boat is running away with us! Jump out quick, and pull it in again.'

"But Reggy poked with a stick over the side, and looked sober. The water was already over his head, and getting deeper every moment.

"Then a bright thought seized him. 'Don't cry, Emmy!' he exclaimed. 'It isn't our fault; so nobody can scold; and now we'll see the

Island! Just think what fun! It's the most splendiferous chance!' And he swung his hat, and gave a great shout.

"So the whole boat-load, little Tom and all, shouted too, and hurrahed and clapped their hands, and began to talk about what they would do on the Island. They never felt afraid for one moment. Poor little lambs !

"All this time I was bandying words with my friend the Sea, who was in a very ugly humor. I was getting mad myself, and was flinging about, cuffing the ears of the pert little waves as they looked on and tittered over the quarrel, when lo! and behold, I became aware of the Brown family floating out in a boat, and in the highest spirits, to meet us. And then I *was* frightened, as you may imagine.

"There was no time to be lost. Open war between myself and the Sea must begin before long I well knew, but I turned all my efforts to soothe and delay. I coaxed and cajoled, unsaid some sharp words, and stroked the angry waves

the right way, till they took off their white caps which they had put on defiantly, and obeyed my orders like good boys. Then I laid hold of the boat, and drew it along toward the Island. It seemed a pity the children shouldn't go there since they had set their hearts upon it; and, beside, I did not dare to take them home, for there was the Tide growling savagely, and lying in wait on the beach ready to snap at little legs the moment they tried to jump out.

"So I made for the Island. This was precisely what the Browns wished; and they hurrahed louder than ever as they drew near. The excitement became so great I could hardly keep them in the boat. The moment it touched, out they tumbled, big and little, Reggy head over heels, and Nora so nearly in the water that, to save her, I had to let go my hold of the boat; whereupon two artful little billows rushed up, and before I could say 'Jack Robinson' had snatched it out of reach, and were tossing it on their heads with peals of laughter. I was vexed

enough, but there was no help for it. The Browns were prisoners, and must stay on the Island whether they liked it or not.

"But, bless you! there was no question of liking! Nothing so enchanting had ever happened before, the children thought. I looked to see them disappointed at the non-appearance of elephants and tigers,—but not at all! Up and down they raced, on the beach, in the woods, full of fun, and making discoveries of all sorts. In less than two hours Reginald and Jack had a heap of fir-cones higher than their heads, 'for a fire' they said, only unfortunately there were no matches to light it with. Alice and Emmy had filled their aprons with shells and pebbles, Nora was deep in a sand pudding, and Baby Tom had twice been fished from a pool as wet as a frog, and set up in the sun to dry. All were as busy as bees, and not a doubt or fear had so far arisen to mar their pleasure.

"But at last it began to grow late, and the sun was dropping down the sky into a dark

cloud, which lay ready to catch and carry him off. The little ones felt hungry, and began to talk about supper.

"' What shall we have?' they asked.

" Reggy looked important. He took from his pocket a book. It was the very one I told you of,— the one about the Island. Reggy usually had it in his pocket.

"' Let us see,' he said, and read aloud,—

"' We put some of the soup-cakes with water in our iron pot, and placed it over the flame ; and my wife, with little Francis for scullion, took charge of peppering the dinner.'

"' Me don't like pepper,' said Baby, in a disconsolate voice.

"' Not "peppering," — *preparing*,' corrected Emmy, over Reginald's shoulder. ' Baby shan't have any bad pepper. Brother didn't read right.'

"' We haven't got any iron pot,' suggested Alice.

"' Nor any soap-cakes,' said Nora.

"‘*Soup-cakes, little goose!*’ cried the discomfited Reggy. ‘*Nobody eats soap.* Well, then, we must think of something different. Let’s see what else these people had.’ And he read again,—

"‘*We sat down to breakfast, some biscuits and a cocoa-nut full of salt butter being placed on the ground. We toasted our biscuit, and while it was hot applied the butter, and contrived to make a hearty meal.*’

"‘*Bully!*’ cried Jack. ‘*Buttered toast is first-rate!*’

"‘*But there isn’t any butter,*’ said Emmy.

"‘*Nor any biscuit,*’ added Alice, timidly.

"‘*I declare,*’ shouted Reggy, closing the book with a flap, ‘*how in the world is a fellow going to get supper for you as long as you keep standing round telling him there’s nothing to eat!*’

" This made me laugh so, that I had to run behind a bush to have it out. When I came back, the dispute had been made up, and the

children were all setting off in a body along the beach to 'look for a shipwreck.'

"There 'll be a barrel, or something,' asserted Reggy: 'there always is!'

"Then I know what I hope will be in it," shouted Jack, with a caper.

"What?"

"Molasses candy and fire-crackers."

"Now it happened that I was aware of a box drifting about half a mile out or so; and, though I hadn't the least idea of its contents, it struck me it might please the children. So I flew out, and pushed it in. There was an immense uproar as it came floating nearer and nearer. The moment it could be reached, the two boys splashed in, grappled it, and with loud hurrahs dragged it ashore.

"Ting-a-ling! ting-a-ling!" sang Emmy, rapping the lid with her knuckles. 'Come to supper! Tea 's ready! Don't you hear the bell?'

"Where 's the hammer, Em?" asked Reggy.

“‘ I don’t know. Have we got any?’

“‘ Why, didn’t you put one in your pocket?’ demanded Jack, in an indignant voice.

“‘ Jack! A hammer in my pocket! It wouldn’t half go in. Just look!’ And she turned inside out a small muslin triangle, and exhibited some crumbs, one raisin, and a pocket handkerchief far from clean.

“ Well, that’s *too* bad!” cried Jack. “ She’s forgotten every thing, Reggy,— the fish-hooks, the nails, the ball of string, the screw-driver, the— I don’t believe she’s even so much as brought a needle. Have you, Emmy?”

“‘ No: I didn’t know we were coming, you see,’ replied Emmy, in an apologizing tone.

“‘ Never mind,’ said Reginald, good-naturedly, as Jack gave an indignant snort. ‘ Emmy *ought* to have remembered, of course, because she’s the “Mother” of the party, and the one to bring the “miraculous bag.” But to-morrow or next day there’ll be sure to be a wreck, and lots of nice things come ashore, which

will do just as well. So now let's get this fellow open.'

"It was not an easy job. However, what with stones, and a sharp stick, the lid was at last pried off, and a quantity of damp sawdust revealed.

"The children poked and poked. At last Alice hit upon something hard.

"'Perhaps it's a "Westphalia ham,"' she said. No! it was a bottle,

"It had no label; but Reggy knocked the top off against a stone, and took a mouthful.

"'Ph-shew!' he spluttered, and spit it out again.

"'What is it?' cried the rest.

"'Horrid! salt!' cried Reggy, making dreadful faces. 'It's that stuff Papa takes sometimes before breakfast,—I forget the name.'

"'Saratoga water"?' said Alice, sniffing it daintily, and applying her tongue. "So it is. Well, that's real mean! I didn't suppose medicines and such things ever came ashore on Desert Islands!'

"It was clearly impossible to make a meal of 'Saratoga water.' So, hungry and slow, the party went back to the grove.

"'I'll tell you what,' said Reginald, 'the first thing in the morning we'll catch a buffalo or a wild ass, and tame him. Luckily I've a piece of string in my pocket, so we can "pierce his nostrils," and put it in. Then I'll gallop round to the other side of the Island, you know, and find things.'

"'I want my supper,' wailed Nora, who was too tired and hungry to be consoled with this distant prospect of a wild ass.

"Tom began to cry too; and for a while the older ones were at their wits' end to comfort them. Some blueberries which they found had the desired effect at last; and, cuddled in their sisters' laps, the little creatures fell asleep. The whole party nestled together in a mossy place in the woods. The waves on the beach began to sound hollow and mournful. Alice shuddered a little.

"Please hold my hand tight, Reggy," she said.

"Oh dear!" sighed Emmy. "Was that a drop of rain on my nose? I do believe it's going to sprinkle! And we haven't any umbrellas."

"What did the people in the book do when it sprinkled?" asked Reginald. "Or didn't it ever sprinkle there?"

"Only in the "rainy season,"" replied Emmy; "and then they shut themselves up in a cave. It must be nice to have "rainy seasons," and know just what to expect. Here, it just rains whenever it likes, and catches you!"

"No more drops came, however; and before long sleep fell upon the group. So sound were their slumbers that when, some hours later, a horned creature stuck his head through the bushes, and then retreated with a loud bellow, nobody stirred except Reginald. He, half-awake, started up, muttering drowsily, "There's the buffalo: we'll fix him to-morrow." But the noise died away; and he tumbled down again, and was asleep in a minute.

" Soon after the flapping of sails reached my ear, and I ran down to the beach. Sure enough, a white sail like a ghost was gliding rapidly toward the Island. It was a boat. On the deck was Mr. Brown, looking wild and ghastly,— quite unlike his usual jolly, comfortable self.

" 'There isn't half a chance,' he muttered as he sprang ashore. He went questing up and down with a lantern. I followed, whispering comforting things in his ear; but he never listened. At last he lighted on Emmy's pocket-handkerchief lying beside the smashed box.

" 'It's hers!' he cried, trembling with anxiety.
'Search for the boat, men.'

" But no boat could be found, and the Father groaned aloud.

" Meantime I was gently pulling Mr. Brown, now by the collar and now by the coat-tail, and trying to turn him in the right direction. He was frantic and obstinate, as men usually are; so he *would* not follow. At last, as hope grew

less, his strength seemed to go too; and, little by little, I drew him along to where the children lay. He was almost upon them before he knew it. There they were, fast asleep, — Tom in Alice's lap, and Nora hugged tight in Jack's arms.

"Well, you never saw any one behave as Mr. Brown did. He was like a crazy person. He felt the warm little hands and the round cheeks, as if he couldn't believe his eyes; and made inarticulate sounds over them, like some loving dumb animal. The sailors lifted them, still asleep, and wrapped them warmly; but, just as they were moving off, Jack roused. There was a stamping, bellowing sound in the brush-wood near by.

"'There's the buffalo again!' he cried. 'Catch him, Reggy!' Then, waking more completely, 'Why, it's Papa! O Papa, don't let's leave the buffalo behind!'

"'Buffalo!' said one of the men. 'There's no buffalo, sir. That's one of Farmer New-

man's cows. He pastures them here in the summer.'

"Reggy was the next to wake. 'Oh, it's the savages!' he exclaimed. 'They've got us! Why, Papa, is it *you*?'

"Alice and Emmy roused at his cry, to be first frightened, then charmed, to find themselves under their Father's care. Before long the whole party were awake, and lively as crickets.

"'Only think, Emmy, I thought it was a buffalo, and it's only a cow!' concluded Jack.

"'Cows!' shuddered Alice. 'Were there any cows on the Island? O Papa, I'm so glad you came for us! I should have been so scared!'

"'Why, Alice!' cried Reginald. 'Afraid! when you know you *said* you wanted to have a rhinoceros come, or at least an anaconda?'

"'Oh well!' replied Alice, 'I wouldn't have minded *them*; but I'm afraid of cows!'

"I wasn't quite easy all the way across. The Sea had evidently got his back up, and I didn't

know but he might yet break out at any moment, and do some dreadful mischief to the Browns. All went well, however; and just in the faint gray of morning the boat scraped the sand, where stood, dimly seen, a waiting figure. It was poor Mrs. Brown, who, all that dreadful night, had stood there listening, and looking off to sea.

"All right, Mother!" called out Mr. Brown, in a joyful, husky voice.

"But Mrs. Brown could not speak. When her husband laid little Tom in her arms, and she felt his warm touch, she began to cry. The others crowded about her, she hugged them tight, kissed the up-turned faces without a word, and led them into the house, still crying for joy.

"I had a frog in my own throat, I can tell you," continued September, "so glad was I to see them safe at home again. But the Sea was growling at my heels in a surly way, which aggravated me; so that, there being no longer any reason for keeping the peace, I just went at

him, and relieved my feelings by one of the fiercest quarrels we ever had. For a week we fought like giants. We tossed ships and lighthouses at each other, and filled the world with fear. The people on the coast still talk about it, and call it the great September gale. Though why September, I don't know. I'm sure it was a great deal more Ocean's fault than mine!"

"Oh!" said Thekla, drawing a long breath, "I'm so glad the children got safely to land."

"So am I," said September, dryly. "There were a good many grown people who didn't, I can assure you."



"A book of adventures the Brown children were for ever poring over."

CHAPTER X.

NIPPIE NUTCRACKER.

THINGS went better after this visit of September's. Cool nights began. The noons were still hot, but with a different heat. Something of life and freshness breathed in the air. Thekla's wheel, set out under the spreading boughs of an oak-tree, hummed as it turned, like a great bumble-bee. It had been silent of late, as if languid with August's warmth. Now its voice came back, and it sang merrily as ever. Leaf-shadows fell from overhead, dappling the fair hair of the little spinner, and the fleece of the lamb which lay at her feet. "Lamb" it was still called, though fast getting into sheephood. Thekla had a real motherly feeling toward it; and, as

parents go on calling their boys and girls "the children" when gray hairs and wrinkles have



"Miss N. Nutcracker, the Celebrated Philosopheress, will lecture at Beech-tree Hall."

replaced the curls and roses of youth, so the lamb was likely to remain a lamb in her eyes for ever, should it live to become a patriarch of the flock.

One thing only marred the pleasure of this happy month,—the dear old Grandfather was poorly. Without disease or pain, patient always, gentle, even happy, his strength ebbed daily. Some days he would not rise from his bed at all; on others, he would have his oaken chair drawn out into the sunshine near Thekla's wheel, and would sit there for hours basking in the warmth, and regarding the little girl with fond, wishful eyes. Thekla took tender care of him. Love showed her how. Love is a wise instructor, you know; and teaches in six lessons what Time, slow old pedagogue, takes a lifetime to impart.

As the end of September drew near, Grandfather seemed a little brighter; and, in her great wish to please and cheer him, a queer idea popped into Thekla's head. It was nothing less

than to tell him all about the Months and the moments, and let him join the story-listening group. She consulted Max; and he thought it a capital plan, provided October made no objections.

So Thekla told the tale in her pretty, soft voice; and Grandfather nodded his head a great deal, and smiled, and was well pleased. How much he understood is doubtful;—Old Age was singing its sweet lullabys to the weary brain, and it was fast going to sleep, though now and then it flashed again into wakefulness for a few moments. Thus much he comprehended,—that a visitor was coming, and he must be ready. So Thekla smoothed his white hair, and made him neat; and when October appeared at the door, there sat Grandfather between the children, like a snow-covered bough supported by two ripe roses.

Max and Thekla flew to meet the guest, and to whisper their request, to which he listened with a kindly face, pinching each round cheek

gently meanwhile till it glowed with a fresher pink. When they ended, he smiled, well-pleased.

"Yes, indeed," he said: "the Grandfather shall stay. He is my old friend. I knew him when he was no bigger than you, and he knew me. But then the time came, as it will to you, when he saw without seeing, and I was to him but a name. To the very young and the very old only am I visible; for they are children alike. He will know me at once, be sure of that."

So saying, he walked in, sat down close by the oaken chair, and laid his hand on Grandfather's arm. The old man turned slowly, and a look of recognition crept into his dim eyes.

"Catch ! Carl, catch !" he murmured. "Where 's the basket ? There never were so many beech-nuts on the tree before."

"That was the other boy," explained October, in a whisper. "They always went about together. But it 's a long time since I saw him."

The children stood silent, watching the strange smiles which chased each other over Grand-father's lips. Now, too, they could look at October, and see what manner of person he was. He had the brown, bearded face of a man in his prime ; but the hair was grizzled with gray. There was something fatherly in the eyes, which were blue and merry. His hunter's dress — of scarlet, gold, russet, crimson, and orange — was so gay that it would have seemed fantastic except for the grace with which he wore it. A spray of purple leaves nodded in his cap; a horn swung at his side, and beneath it a great pouch of fur into which he now plunged his hand.

"Do you like chestnuts ?" he said, throwing a double handful into Thekla's lap. "Ah! I see you do. That's right ! I always carry them about with me for the children. And I always say, 'Don't crack nuts with your teeth ;' and they always do it, just the same as if I hadn't spoken, as Max is doing now."

"What is that in your bag ?" asked Max,

boldly, pointing to a great sack which October had thrown down on entering.

"Samples," replied October, briskly. "You see, I belong to a firm of dyers,—a celebrated one,—'Brown October & Co.' These are our novelties for the season. Look!" And, seizing the bag by the bottom, he shook out upon the floor what seemed to be rainbows in confusion,—a vast heap of brilliant scraps, so vivid and so various that nobody could count the different tints.

"Two billion new shades," went on October, triumphantly; "all patented, warranted to wash, and unlike any thing seen in the shop last year. Where is the mortal dyer, outside our firm, who can say that?" Then he began cramming the samples into the bag again. When order was restored, he turned toward Grandfather's chair, and said in a gentle voice, "Would you like to hear one more story from me, old friend, before you and I part for ever?"

Grandfather nodded his head. "You used to

tell nice ones to Carl and me," he answered.
"One more! one more!"

So October began:—

"It's about squirrels. People generally don't appreciate squirrels. They overlook them entirely, or else they make pies of them, which is unjust and disagreeable.

"I know them well, so they talk freely before me, and let out their secrets, which people never do until they are intimate. All the best circles of squirrel-dom are open to me; and the Nutcrackers, who are perhaps the most aristocratic family in the set, are my particular friends, and have been for generations.

"It is about Nippy Nutcracker that I am going to tell. It is a true story; and I hope it may be a warning to you, Thekla, and to other young females of your age.

"Nippy, in her earliest squirrelhood, was one of the prettiest creatures I ever saw. In those days she spelt the name 'Nippie,' and had it thus engraved in monogram on the birch-bark

cards she was in the habit of leaving at the nests of her acquaintances. Later, she changed it again to plain ‘Nippy;’ and the other squirrels agreed it was just as well she should,—for reasons.

“A fashionable belle of the first water was Nippie,—slender, graceful, bewitching,—with a most beautiful long tail, which she put up in hot pine-needles every night, and fluffed out in the morning till it stood like a glory round her head when she waved it. And this she did very often, especially when desirable bachelor squirrels were about. All the Nutcrackers were beside themselves with pride over the possession of this lovely creature. Distinguished suitors came from far and near, bringing such gifts of beech-nuts, acorns, and toothsome walnut-meats all picked out of the shells, that Nippie’s bower used to look like a provision-market. But to none of her lovers did she give any encouragement; for her secret heart was set upon King Nutcracker, the chief of her tribe.

"This mighty monarch was getting on in years; but he possessed great gallantry of manner, and had been heard to say that never within his experience did so lovely a vision as Miss Nutcracker alight on earthly bough. This speech fired Nippie's ambitious heart: which was unlucky; for, as it happened, King Nutcracker already possessed a spouse, of his own age, to whom, in spite of his fine speeches, he was at bottom quite devoted. They lived in the top of a royal oak, their children occupying neighboring branches; and, as each year some eight or ten fresh princes and princesses entered the world, the family circle, as can be imagined, was a large one.

"The Queen was plain and old-fashioned. She never curled her tail, and thought hot pine-needles absolutely sinful. But she had a resolute character and great strength of constitution; and did not feel the least desire to die and make room for Nippie, if she could possibly help it. All things considered, therefore, the chance did

not seem very good. But Nippie clung to hope. Queen Nutcracker, she reflected, *must* drop off some day; and the King would naturally look to the fairest as her successor. ‘Queen Nippie’ sounded well; — she would refurnish the royal nest, and astonish society. It was worth waiting for. So she waited.

“One year — two, three, four. Lovers came, and went; Nippie snubbing them all right royally. Still Queen Nutcracker lived and flourished; and still every spring eight or ten lovely princes and princesses appeared to swell the population of the royal oak. Five years — six. Nippie’s resplendent tail began to look thin, and a little worn. Hot pine-needles are very bad for tails, they say. She lost a front tooth; her nose grew sharp; and her figure, once so graceful, was now painfully thin. Suitors became weary of the Nutcracker beech, and the few who showed themselves were mere children, on the look-out for some younger Nutcrackers who were growing up. Nippie felt

that her day was past; that the sun was ceasing to shine, and her hay not made; and, as the conviction forced itself upon her mind, her temper waxed horribly uneven. She took to shutting herself into her hole, and having nervous attacks; and when these were on, she would say the sharpest and most disagreeable things to her nearest relations.

"This of course did not add to the happiness of the family. Her nephews and nieces — full of spirits, and selfish, like all young creatures — pronounced her in private 'a dreadful old cat,' and took pleasure in teasing her, laughing at her little airs and graces, and alluding to her age in the most unfeeling way. Even her brothers and sisters, tired out by her tantrums, did not stand up for her as they ought. So life seemed pretty hard to poor Nippie; and there were moments when she wished herself made into pie, and an end put to every thing.

"But this was during the betwixt-and-between period which comes to everybody some time or

other. For Nippie was not the sort of squirrel to settle down into insignificance without at least making a good fight for herself. She had failed as a beauty; but it was still possible to succeed as something else. She was not long in deciding what this should be. She would become ‘strong-minded.’

“Her first step was leaving off the ‘ie’ from her name. Nicknames, she declared, especially those ending in *ie*, were silly and affected. As she had been privately spoken of as ‘Nip’ for some time past among her young relations, no one made the least objection to the change. So Nippie the belle became plain Nippy; and soon after, to the astonishment of her friends, beech-leaves began to circulate about, bearing the name of ‘Dr. Nutcracker,’ and it was announced that Nippy had adopted the practice of medicine.

“This, however, was another failure, and did not last long. Nippy began in a small way with a remedy of her own invention, which she called ‘acorn-water,’ and which consisted of portions of a neighboring brook upon which the shadow

of an acorn had been allowed to lie for two hours and twenty minutes by the sun. But most of the squirrels laughed at the new medicine, and declared that it did them no good; while the few who believed injured the water almost as much, by calling it dangerously strong. At last one very nervous old lady, Mrs. Hopper by name, was thrown into a fit by finding out, two days afterward, that she had by mistake swallowed half a drop more than the right dose; and after that nobody dared to try any more. So, upon the whole, Nippy decided not to be a Doctress, but something else. She took a week to think it over, and then startled the whole community by the following placard: —

Miss N. Nutcracker,
the Celebrated Philosopheress,
will lecture at Beech-tree Hall
on Thursday, at 5 p.m. precisely.

Subject :
“Why should not Squirrels lay Eggs?”
Admission, 25 beech-nuts.
Reserved seats, 2 acorns.
Children, half-price.

"Nothing can describe the excitement caused by this announcement, which was inscribed on a huge moose-wood leaf, and pinned with thorns to the royal oak. No lady-squirrel had ever before appeared on a public platform, and all the old fogies felt that it was the beginning of great changes. Everybody wanted to go, however, especially when the King sent down a servant with both cheeks stuffed full of acorns, and engaged the best seats for himself and party. When the hour came, there was hardly standing-room left on the Nutcracker beech. Nippy took her station on the top bough, with the utmost dignity of manner. There was nothing left of the flirting, foolish ways of the ex-belle. Her poor thin tail was screwed tightly into a French twist. She wore a plain gray gown, and black gloves. She had practised speaking with her mouth full of nuts so long, that every word she uttered could be heard distinctly; and I assure you her audience listened with both eyes and ears.

"I'm sorry that I cannot remember the lecture," continued October; "for it was very fine. Nippy took the ground that as squirrels live in trees, and so do birds; — and as squirrels make nests, and so do birds; — and as squirrels have tails, and birds the same, — so it was the duty of squirrels to lay eggs, just as much as it was the duty of birds. Everybody applauded and agreed, but didn't very well know how to do any thing more about it. So, after all, the lecture produced no practical result, except by making a great deal of talk.

"But this was precisely what Miss Nutcracker wished. She felt that her enterprise was succeeding, and that a glorious future lay before her. Other lectures followed. There was one on 'Food;' one on 'What to do with the Shells?' another on 'Hygiene' (which the average squirrel persisted in calling 'High Jinks,' and treating accordingly); and a fourth on 'The New Departure,' which meant the removal of the Nutcracker tribe to another tree, with more

nuts on it. But the most famous lecture of all was announced to be 'for ladies only,' and its subject was 'The Wrongs of Squirrelesses.'

"Nippy told her audience (which they had not known before) that they had always been abused and unhappy. She reminded them with great eloquence how the largest nuts were apt to fall to the lot of the male squirrels, who were usually up and at work early of mornings, while their wives slept; how fathers of families were apt to go sky-larking off into the woods, leaving their partners at home with nests full of little ones; how they came back late at night and disturbed the house; and many other things. So pathetic was the picture that, before the lecture ended, most of the company were in tears. The gentlemen, who had been sitting in distant trees meanwhile, trying to look as if they didn't know that any thing was going on, but secretly wild with curiosity, were confounded when, at the end of the discourse, all the squirrelesses came trooping home slowly and sadly, with tails in

their eyes, and not a skip or bound among them. That night nothing but sobs and recriminations were heard among the boughs. Even the royal oak caught the infection. The princes and princesses were disputing and scolding right and left; and nobody kept their good humor except the sensible old Queen, who had refused to attend the lecture.

"Shut up, and go to sleep!" she exclaimed at last. "You are a parcel of nonsensical fools. Since I became a squirrel I never heard of any thing so ridiculous; and if I had my way, that Nippy Nutcracker should be made into a fricassee by noon to-morrow, before she has time to do more mischief."

"But vainly did the royal dame utter her homely wisdom. Nippy, sporting in unfricasseed freedom, with the whole range of social abuses before her, was more than a match for the aged Queen, to whom nobody listened for a moment. The next week the lecture was 'Repeated by Request.' Others followed, of a still more dan-

gerous character; such as, ‘Frisk in Fetters,’ and ‘Why are Incisors granted to Both Sexes?’ A dreadful little ballad was composed, and sung by the strong-minded, whose number became daily larger and more formidable. I remember only a fragment, but it gives an idea of the whole: —

‘Who would stay and mind her young,
Who would gladly hold her tongue,
Who before her lord be dumb,
Let her turn and flee.

‘Let her turn in cage of tin,
Clattering with revolving din;
Grazing fur and grazing skin,
Good enough for she !’

“The grammar,” said October, “is defective, you observe. But that is little. Grammar and all other rules are defied by the strong-minded, — when they happen to be squirrels.

“This was last autumn. Just as I left, a lecture was announced upon ‘The Royal Family an Excrescence !’ What the state of affairs may be now I do not know, and I dare

not guess. I confess that it is with reluctance that I return to the grove. From what I know of Miss Nutcracker, it would not surprise me to find all the old pleasant state of things changed, the King and Queen in exile, a Republic proclaimed, and Nippy at the head of affairs as Provisional Governess!"

Grandfather had been as much entertained at the story as any one. Listening, his face grew young again, his laugh mingled with the merry peals from Max and Thekla, and was almost as gay in sound. But, as October drew to a close, he seemed to become weary; and, when the last words were spoken, they looked at him, and he was fast asleep.

"Better so," whispered October. "He will miss me less."

In silence he measured his moments from the can; silently bent over the white head, and touched it with his lips; and on tiptoe stole from the room.

The children followed noiselessly.

"That story didn't really have any end, did it?" said Thekla, when they were outside.

"No," replied October, "there is no use trying to put ends to things which have Nippy Nutcrackers mixed up with them."



"A fashionable belle of the first water was Nippie."

CHAPTER XI.

“CHUSEY.”

WHEN the children stole back again into the hut after October had gone, Grandfather was still asleep. But before long he roused himself suddenly, rubbed his eyes, and stared at them in a strange, bewildered way.

“Where is Carl?” he said. “Has he hidden himself to plague me? I know he loves to tease, but this is too bad.”

“Grandfather,” said Thekla, gently, “you are not quite waked up yet. It was only a dream! There is nobody here but Max and me.”

The old man looked wildly at her for a moment. Then he came to himself, smiled, and stroked her hair. “So,” he said, “only Max and

you, Liebchen! Well, it was a nice dream while it lasted; and now I will go to bed.”

So Grandfather went to bed. But neither the



“ ‘We don’t want our Chusey killed — we don’t want him for dinner — we don’t like turkeys when they’re d-e-a-d,’ sobbed the children.”

next day, nor the next, nor the next, did he rise; and soon it became an accepted fact that Grand-father did not care to get up any more. He had no pain, and smiled often; but he seldom spoke, and when he did it was of old times, which seemed to be fresher to his mind than the things which were about him. Thekla moved her wheel in-doors, and sat where his eyes could rest upon her the moment he waked; while Max, laying aside all his boyish brisk and bounce, moved about the cottage with steps gentle as a girl's. And so, quietly and rather sadly, the month wore away.

The last evening proved a fierce and gusty one. Amid the pauses of the wind a soft whirring sound as of wings beating outside could be heard. It came from great heaps of rustling leaves driven against the cottage walls by the blast. No other noise broke the stillness, except the crackling of a pine fagot upon the fire, which filled the room with light and fragrance. Thekla and Max sat silently beside the blaze; — the Grand-father slept. It was so long since either had

spoken, that when at last a sharp knock fell upon the door both the children jumped from their seats.

Max hastened to open, and to make a polite bow to the new-comer, while Thekla brought a chair. November, a rough looking personage in a gray pea-jacket and flapped hat, took it without ceremony, only saying, "All right," in a gruff voice. He seemed so big and strong that the boy and girl felt timid. They drew nearer each other, and were not sure exactly how to begin. But when November took off his hat, which he did pretty soon, the face he showed was a kind one, in spite of the rough beard and wild hair, which had evidently not been combed for years, if ever. It was a brown and weather-beaten face; but the eyes were full of that friendly light which children love, and the little ones no longer felt afraid. November looked at them for a moment from under his shaggy eyebrows, and then began fumbling with the knots of a red bandanna handkerchief in which something was tied up.

“There!” he said, when at last he got it open, “there’s my present. It came from ever so far away, and a fine piece of work I had to keep it from being smashed on the road. It’s all safe however, I believe, except the edges, which are a little chipped. But that’s nothing. Get your knives and forks, young ones, and fall to.”

This present was a pie,—a fine yellow pie, mottled with brown spots and baked in a red earthenware dish. Max and Thekla had never seen any thing like it before. It felt still warm from the oven; and smelt so delicious and spicy, that it was impossible to keep from eating it at once, as November urged them to do. So Max ran for two horn spoons; and, after a piece was laid aside for Grandfather, he and Thekla began to devour the rest.

“Oh my!” said Max, as he took his first bite, “isn’t it good?”

“Won’t you have a bit, sir?” asked Thekla, who was a polite little creature.

“Bless you! — no,” replied November, who

looked highly pleased at the success of his gift.
“I never eat ‘em till the proper time comes, and that isn’t for three weeks yet. But I know an old lady who persists in making them all the year round, in season and out; and as I thought a pie would be something new, and a good thing to bring, I dropped in on the way here and stole one from her buttery. They were just whipping the cat for the theft as I came away.”

“But wasn’t that wrong?” asked Max, with his mouth full of the pie.

“Um!” replied November, with a keen, funny look, “if I had squeezed it into a *can* now, and smashed it, perhaps it might have been called so!”

Max blushed, and hung down his head.

“Never mind,” went on November, more kindly. “We won’t discuss the point of our respective honesties, I think! But I must confess that we Months are not as conscientious as we should be. Every one of us steal something wherever we go; and the worst of it is, that we

never bring what we steal back again. Heigho!” And he looked silently into the fire for some time.

By this the last mouthful of pie had disappeared; and Thekla had carried off the dish and the spoons, and put them out of sight.

“Was it good?” asked November, meeting her eye with a smile.

“Very, very good,” she answered. “I never tasted any pies like it. Do you know what it is made of, sir?”

“I believe,” said November, “the exact recipe runs thus: ‘As little pumpkin as possible, and as much of every thing else as possible.’ But it’s no use your trying to make one. They don’t succeed anywhere except in that country on the other side the ocean, where this came from. There they have a knack at ’em.”

“Oh, tell us about the other side the ocean!” cried the children.

“I’m going to,” replied November. “That’s where my story happened.

“It was way out on the Western frontier—Do you know what a frontier is?” suddenly interrupting himself.

No, the children did not know what a frontier was.

“A frontier,” continued November, “is the edge of civilization; and rough and shaggy enough it is, as edges are apt to be. It is the battle-ground where men and Nature meet and fight it out. Ah! the men have hard times there, I can tell you. They have to turn to and use every bit of stuff that is in them, or they get the worst of the conflict. But Nature is a friendly foe. When she has proved them, she grows kind. The trees fall, the stumps come out of the ground. Every year the work done tells more and more; and the frontier is pushed farther and farther away. By and by there won’t be any frontier left, the whole land will be civilized; and people will have every thing they desire,—brick houses, churches, shops, ice-cream saloons, and copies of Tupper’s Proverbial Philosophy.

“ Well, I always visit this frontier as I go my yearly rounds; and it was there that I made acquaintance with Mrs. Fiske’s little children.

“ Four boys and girls there were, the eldest seven, the youngest not quite three; and none of them had ever seen other children except themselves. Their Mother was a sad, hard-worked woman; their Father, a rough, kind-hearted fellow, too busy to notice the little ones much, except now and then on a Sunday evening. So the children were left entirely to each other for amusement; and they seemed to find plenty of it, for a more merry, contented group I never saw. The rude hut in which they lived was beautiful in their eyes; and the forest, with its birds, berries, squirrels, and flowers, like a delightful playfellow.

“ The cabin was off the road for wagon trains: none ever came there. But now and then men on horseback, two or three together, would stop and ask for a meal or a night’s lodging. These were never refused in that hospitable wilderness.

The children were glad when this happened; for the men talked about all sorts of interesting things, and brought newspapers, from which their Father read stories and anecdotes. But Polly, the eldest, a bright, observing girl, noticed that after these visits her Mother always looked sadder than before, and sometimes cried.

Mrs. Fiske came from a State a long way off called Massachusetts. Some of her relations lived there still, and there was the old house where she had been born; but she seldom spoke of it or them. Perhaps she feared to make the children discontented with their lonely life by doing so; and it may be she was wise.

“But the little ones picked up ideas here and there, and made a sort of play of ‘Going to the East,’ where so many wonderful things were. They did not often tell their Mother of these plays: somehow they felt that it gave her pain; but when they were alone with their Father they would talk by the hour, asking questions, and chattering all together like a flock of small crows.

“One night a traveller, who was stopping with them, used a new word.

“‘I don’t know if *Thanksgiving* gets so far out as this,’ he said.

“Mrs. Fiske only answered by a sigh; but her husband replied, ‘Well, no! We’ve had pretty hard times for a spell back; and we never see no newspapers so’s to know what day’s appointed, and so we’ve kind of let it slide. It’s a pity too, that’s a fact. Why, the kids here don’t even know what Thanksgiving means.’”

“Kids?” asked Max, wonderingly.

“He meant the children,” laughed November. “It’s rather a funny word, but some people use it; and as long as it tells what it means it’s a good word. The little Fiskes were used to it.

“‘Well,’ the traveller went on, ‘you shan’t miss the Day this year for want of a paper any how. There’s the “Democrat” of week before last, with the Governor’s Proclamation and all. It’s the 29th you see, four weeks from to-morrow.’

“What does Thanksgiving mean?” asked little Nanny, who was perched on the stranger’s knee. ‘Tell us the ’tory about it.’

“So the traveller, who was a kind man, made quite a story to amuse the children. He told how, long ago, when the land was all wild woods in which only Indians lived, a shipload of English people came across the sea, in the freezing winter, to make a home for themselves in the wilderness. How they suffered hunger, cold, and all sorts of hardships: and at last, after many months, housed their first harvest from a few scanty fields; and, in gratitude for this food which saved them from starvation, set aside a day to be spent in giving God thanks for it. And how, ever since, among their descendants, this day of Thanksgiving had been kept up, and solemnly observed every autumn after the gathering in of the crops.

“Then he told them that in New England, on this day, all the sons and daughters come to the old homestead with their families; and how the

long dinner-tables are set out with good things,—turkeys, pumpkin pies, cranberry sauce, and Indian pudding. And then, last of all, he drew from his pocket a paper, and read aloud the Governor’s Proclamation, calling on all citizens to observe the 29th of November as Thanksgiving Day.

“Before the stranger had finished the children were wild with excitement. But their Mother buried her face in her apron, and sobbed bitterly. That night, after the traveller had gone to bed, she talked more about her old home than ever she had done before, and told Polly a great many things of Massachusetts and its people.

“All the next day the children could think of nothing but the stranger’s wonderful story. Why couldn’t they have Thanksgiving too? they asked their Mother. The Governor said they might.

“‘But we haven’t any thing to keep it with,’ said Mrs. Fiske.

“Oh, yes! there was one big squash left.

Wouldn’t Mother make some pies out of it for them?

“‘ But there are no eggs, or ginger, or lemon-peel,’ answered the poor, discouraged Mother.

“ However, the children begged so hard, that at last she said she *would* try to make some pies. But then Thanksgiving was nothing without a turkey.

“‘ Oh, if we only had a turkey!’ cried the little ones.

“ I happened to come by that day as they were talking; and it seemed to me rather a pity if, in a land full of turkeys, the Fiskes couldn’t have just one to make merry with. So I cast about in my mind for some way of securing a dinner for them. At last I found it. Forty miles off, through the woods, there lived a rich settler, who I knew kept turkeys. His wife had been lucky that year, and had raised a fine brood. There were at least twenty.

“ Among these was one little gobbler, a real vagabond by nature, who was always running

off into the forest. His drumsticks were rather toughish from being so much on his legs, but otherwise he was a good fat bird; and, as it was his evident fate to be lost some day, I thought my little friends might as well have the benefit of him as some wildcat or fox. So I watched my chance; and, catching him a long way from home, I headed him in the right direction, and began to drive him toward the Fiskes' cottage.”

Here Thekla rose, and stole on tiptoe into Grandfather's room; for she fancied that he called. But the old man slept peacefully, and she returned again quietly as she went. November had paused in his story till she should come back.

“Such a time as I had!” he resumed. “The turkey seemed to know my intention, and to be resolved to spite me. Twenty times, at least, he got away, and, gobbling with joy, began to run toward home. Twice I rescued him from a fox, once dragged him from the very jaws of an

opossum. Nothing but my love for the children induced me to go through the task; and I was glad and thankful enough when at last the journey was over, and we arrived safely at the clearing.

“Little Zeke spied him first. ‘Oh, what a big birdie !’ he cried, and made a rush at him. The turkey was too tired to run far, so in a few moments Zeke had him tied by the leg to a tree.

“‘Mother ! Polly ! Nanny ! Baby !’ he screamed. ‘Come and see what I’ve got !’

“All came flocking at the call. ‘Why, it’s a turkey !’ exclaimed Mrs. Fiske, — ‘and a real tame turkey, not a wild one at all !’

“It’s come for Thanksgiving !’ shouted Polly. ‘Hurrah ! hurrah ! now we’ll have it for dinner.’

“‘Gobble, gobble, gobble,’ said the turkey.

“‘Why, so we will, old fellow !’ replied Zeke.

“By general consent the turkey was fastened in a corner of the kitchen, by a string round his leg. He thus became a part of the family. The children were very fond of him. They stuffed

him all day long with bread-crumbs, doughnuts, bits of meat, and other dainties; so, though he missed his usual exercise, he was a happy and contented turkey, and soon grew so fat that Mrs. Fiske said he would make a splendid dinner.

“‘Massachusetts’ was the name chosen for him, but it was shortened to ‘Chusey’ because that was easier. Before long he had become wonderfully tame. He would run to the end of his string to greet the family, when they came down in the morning; he ate from the children’s hands, and let the baby stroke and ruffle his feathers with her soft fingers as much as she liked.

“Little did the poor fellow guess that the young friends whom he welcomed so gladly were already arranging among themselves how to divide the choice bits of his carcass. Zeke had spoken for one wish-bone, and Polly for the other; Nanny was resolute as to the possession of his tail; and Pop, the baby, was to have a drumstick to suck. All had requested large

helps of the breast and plenty of gravy. But, as time went on, the Mother noticed that this savory future was less talked about, and that Nanny and Polly were often to be seen patting the turkey's back, and calling him 'Poor Chusey!' in a pathetic manner.

"At last the great day drew near. The pies were made,—rather singular as to looks, I confess, and a good deal more like porridge than pie, but not at all bad notwithstanding. Mrs. Fiske had picked some wild cranberries, and stewed them with maple sugar. A fine pile of mealy potatoes was chosen and washed. Nothing remained but to kill Massachusetts, and prepare him for the spit.

"I'll attend to it when I come home to-night," said Mr. Fiske.

"So, when his work was done, he sharpened a hatchet, and brought it with him ready for the bloody deed. But, lo! and behold, there on the floor were the four children, sitting round their beloved Chusey. They were all

crying; and, at the sight of his Father, Pop gave a shriek.

“‘Naughty, naughty!’ he said, and pushed with his little hands. ‘Go ’way, Daddy,—go ’way!’

“‘What ’s the matter?’ asked Mr. Fiske, very much astonished.

“‘We don’t want our Chusey killed — we don’t want him for dinner!’ sobbed the children. ‘We love him so much! We don’t like turkeys when they ’re d-e-a-d !’ And again the baby broke in with, ‘Go ’way, naughty! go ’way.’”

“‘Well, if ever I see the beat of that!’ cried the Father. ‘It did seem as if that turkey was sent a-purpose, and here you are cutting up like this!’

“ But the children would not listen to any objections. Chusey was their turkey, they said; they loved him, and he should not be eaten.

“‘He ’s just as much right to Thanksgiving as we have,’ asserted Zeke. ‘He ’s “a citizen,” and we mean to give him some of the pie.’

“So the programme was suddenly changed. Instead of making a figure *on* the table, Massachusetts came *to* the table, and was one of the company. Tied to Pop’s chair, he was regaled with all sorts of choice morsels. The family dined on salt pork and venison, with cranberry sauce and pumpkin porridge; but, though the fare was rather queer, few happier dinners were eaten that day anywhere. Even Mrs. Fiske came out of her clouds, and was jolly. As for ‘Chusey,’ he gobbled and clucked and chuckled, enjoyed the jokes as much as any one, and seemed to enter fully into the spirit of the occasion.”

“How nice that was!” said warm-hearted Thekla, as November ended. “I love the children for not eating Chusey.”

“So do I,” replied November, heartily; “and this year I mean they shall have something very nice. It’s getting to be a little less frontier-like out there, and I think I see my way.”

“Oh, tell us what!” cried Max.

But November shook his head. “Never spoil your eggs by chipping the shells too soon,” said he. “I know how to keep a secret. And now let’s have that can of yours, and I’ll take my moments; for I’m late, and must be off.”

He tied the moments in the red bandanna handkerchief, shook hands in a friendly way, and without another word was gone.

“Oh, isn’t he nice!” said Thekla.



“Chusey came to the table, and, tied to Pop’s chair, was regaled with all sorts of choice morsels.”

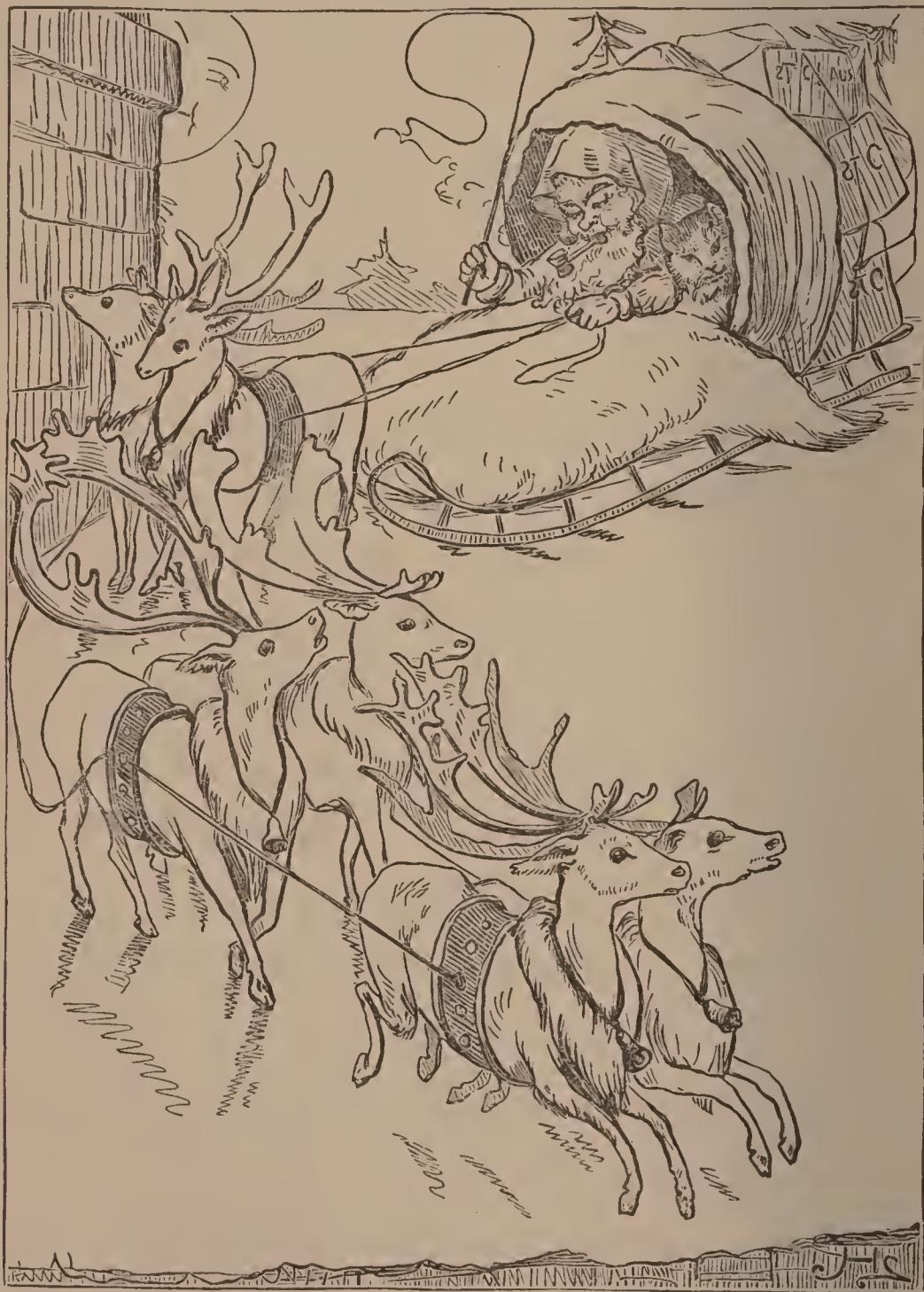
CHAPTER XII.

HOW THE CAT KEPT CHRISTMAS.

AND now the last evening of November was come; and Winter, stealing a march on the departing Autumn, let loose, as if in a hurry to begin, his first storm upon the world. Strong winds raged in the Forest, driving the leaves in clouds before them, and snapping and rending the patient, tortured trees. Ink-black clouds scared away the Moon, when she tried to shine; sharp sleet struck the windows of the Woodman's hut, like a myriad of tiny fists; and the blast wailed and moaned about the chimney, like the voice of one in pain.

Max and Thekla heard the uproar, and trembled, as they sat by the fire. Often before had

they listened to storms with a certain pleasurable sense that home was rendered snugger by



"So the Cat told her story. 'And for a wish,' she said, 'if your Saintship would only permit me to slip in under your furs, and go along,' — 'Why, jump in at once,' said St. Nicholas."

the contrast. But now they shivered and clung together, and tears were in Thekla's eyes as she nestled her head upon her brother's shoulder. The kitchen did not wear its usual cheery look. And no wonder ! There was sorrow in the cottage ; for dear old Grandfather, who had loved them both so fondly, and been so loved in return, was gone away for ever !

Only a week before he had died, quietly, painlessly, with a smile on his lips, and blessing them at the last. The far-away neighbors had assembled ; and with pitying looks and kind words had taken the aged form, and laid it to rest beside other graves where slept the friends of his youth. But still, in spite of the lonely house and the vacant chair, Thekla could not feel that Grandfather was far away ; and every hour she silently did this thing or that because it would once have pleased him to have them done, and the thought that he still knew and was pleased comforted her. And perhaps Thekla was right in her innocent faith, for the friends we can no longer see may be nearer to us than we think.

When an old tree is blown down, all the delicate grasses and sweet herbs which cluster at its foot are uprooted by the shock. So it was with these two little human flowers. The fall of their sheltering friend tore them from their accustomed place. Already the neighbors had talked over and settled what the children must do. Max was to be bound apprentice to a clockmaker in the distant town, and Thekla to live with a farmer's dame who had offered to take and train her as a servant. The thought of parting was dreadful to them; and they had begged so hard and so tearfully to be allowed to stay together in the hut for a few weeks longer, — just till a new Ranger should take possession, — that at last, won by their distress, consent was given. There was wood and meal and vegetables enough in the cellar to keep them without expense to anybody. If the poor things liked to eat the stores themselves, instead of selling them, why it was a good plan, people said. So there the two sat on this stormy evening, alone in the lonely Forest,

and expecting the arrival of December, last of that wonderful company who had made the year so strangely interesting.

They had not long to wait. There came a lull in the wind, and far off in the distance a voice was heard raised in a commanding tone, and gradually drawing nearer.

"There ! there !" were the first words they caught: "that will do. Leave the oaks alone, you rascals! Time enough for such pranks when I'm gone. As for that hemlock,—winds will be winds, I know, and what 's done can never be undone; but don't let me catch you at another." Here the voice ceased; then there was a rattling at the latch, and next moment the door opened, and in came a tall figure leaning on a staff, but moving so lightly and easily that it suggested any thing rather than age or infirmity.

This was December, a fine, stately man, dressed in white and green, with a fur cloak flung about his shoulders and a hat decked with holly sprigs. Age and youth seemed funnily contrasted in his

face; for, while hair and beard were white as hoar-frost, the cheeks were like ripe winter-apples, and the blue eyes sparkled with fun and fire. He entered with a sort of jolly rush; but, when he saw Thekla's black frock and the traces of tears upon her cheeks, his mood changed at once. Closing the door gently, he sat down before the fire, and, holding out his hand with an expression of indescribable kindness, said in a tone full of sympathy, "My poor children!"

That was all: but in another moment Thekla's arm was round his neck on one side, and Max's on the other; — he had drawn them on to his knees, and they were sobbing out their griefs as if they had known him always. They told how sorry they were to part, how lonely the cottage seemed, how forlorn it was to be poor and at the mercy of others; and December listened, his eyes glistening with pity and his kind arms hugging them close. It was like having Grandfather back again, the children thought.

The new friend was wise. He did not inter-

rupt or try to comfort till they had got quite through. It was wonderful what relief came just from telling all to somebody who cared to listen. By the time the story was over the boy and girl felt happier than for days; and not till then did December speak.

"Courage!" he said. "It's always darkest just before day. Why, the Lord takes care of birds and cats and squirrels, of a whole world full of tiny winged creatures, and all the fishes of the sea. Do you suppose he will forget just you two, out of all the little ones whom he protects? Never! Why, I *could* tell you,—but I must not, it is not permitted,—only, even a Month may venture on a hint, and so I'll just say, wait, and see what's ahead!" And December ended this mysterious sentence with pursing up his lips very tight, winking hard with both eyes, and nodding his head in a singular and provoking manner.

"Oh, what?" cried the children.

"I shan't say another word," replied Decem-

ber. "No! you needn't look at me with such big, imploring eyes: it's no use. But just you keep up brave hearts, and trust in God,— and you'll see! As for the Grandfather," here his voice grew deep and solemn, like the sound of bells, "I know you miss him sorely; but don't cry for him any more. He has gone where he is young again; and, when your turn comes to go too, you will wonder that ever you shed a tear because he was made so very happy."

December's face became beautiful as he spoke these last words, and Thekla stole the other arm tenderly about his neck. A glittering chain hung there, with pendants shaped like icicles. Touching it, she started, it was so very cold.

"Is it made of ice?" she asked.

"Well, you can call it so, if you like," responded December, smiling; "but I say 'crystallized gases.' It sounds better, I think.

"I hope it won't put you out," he went on, "if I should ask leave to *read* my story, instead of telling it. I am so very, *very* old, you see,"—

here his eyes twinkled with fun,—“that my memory is almost gone; and, unless I write things down, I am always forgetting them.” Whereupon he pulled a roll of paper from his pocket, and perching a pair of spectacles with tortoise-shell rims on his nose, very high up, looked from under them at the children in a comical manner. Thekla and Max could not help laughing. In spite of his white hair, it seemed somehow a great joke that December should call himself so very, very old.

“It’s a cheerful kind of a story,” continued he. “I picked it out on purpose, for I guessed I should find you moping; and I thought something lively would be good for you.”

Thus speaking, December pushed the glasses up higher on his forehead, so as to be able to see well from beneath them, and began to read,—

“How THE CAT KEPT CHRISTMAS.”

“What a queer name for a story!” said Thekla.
“Yes; and it was a queer Cat too,” replied

December. "I knew her. Tortoise-shell, with long whiskers, and rather a ragged tail."

Then he went on.

"The ringers were practising the Christmas chimes in low, muffled tones. High up, the steeple rocked in the wind, the clouds drifted rapidly over the moon, and clear and sharp the frost-film glittered on the roofs. The watchman on his round clapped and stamped to warm hands and feet, as he called the hour, 'Eight o'clock, and all's well!' But, to the poor Cat crouched beneath the kitchen-window, all was *not* well.

"'Oh dear!' she sighed to herself, 'what a thing it is to have a Step-mother! Once we were happy! The good Papa loved me, and I slept in Gretchen's arms. The fire was bright in those days. Porringers of hot milk stood by it, and always a saucer full for me. Ah, dear days! The moment I saw that nose of hers, I knew they were over! Such a nose! so red, so long. Why did the Papa marry her? Men are *so* fool-

ish. I hissed, I spit, I warned,—nobody listened, and here I am. The good Papa dares not protect me. Gretchen weeps: the Step-dame bars the door. Hew! what a wind! What a Christmas Eve! Poor Gretchen! Poor me!' Overcome by her sorrows, the Cat gave a loud wail, which rang out into the chilly night. Then the door opened softly.

"'Puss! puss!' said a small voice, 'where are you?'

"Pussy ran forward into view, and jumped and leaped at her mistress.

"'Oh, my Katchen,' went on the little one, 'how cold it is! You will freeze! you will die. Oh, if I dared but let you in!'

"'I'll scratch her eyes out!' muttered the Cat.

"'Shall I throw my little red shawl to you from the window?' continued Gretchen. 'My poor one! my Kitty!'

"'Gretchen!' screamed a voice, 'if you let that good-for-nothing Cat into the house, you taste the stick! Dost hear?'

"Gretchen turned pale. 'O Kitty!' was all she said. She gave a sob of despair. Then the door was shut.

"'This is a nice business,' thought the Cat. 'Oh, the witch! I hope the mice will come down to-night, and steal the very teeth out of her head. But I'll have vengeance yet. There's that big gray rat in the cellar: I'll strike a bargain with him,—life and liberty, provided he plagues her to death, eats the linen, claws the jam, gnaws bung-holes in the cask, and lets the beer out! We'll see! Meantime, I shall freeze unless something is done. Let me explore.'

"High and low did the Cat search,—over the fence, under the vine,—but no shelter could be found. The vine was leafless, the fence gave no hiding-place. At last she bethought herself of the roof, which it was easy to mount by means of a long and sloping rain-trough. Perhaps there might be a warm chimney there,—no bad pillow on a wintry night.

"There proved to be a warmish one; and, curling into a ball, Puss laid herself to rest against it. Perhaps it was not warm enough, perhaps the remembrance of wrong was too bitter within her; certain it is she could not sleep. She wriggled, she twisted; she sent forth melancholy cries, which rang strangely across the icy roofs as if some ghost afflicted with toothache had gone there for an airing. Nine—ten—eleven—had sounded before she fell into her first doze,—the clock was on the stroke of twelve, when a scraping and scratching sound close by roused her. Was it some other cat? or the big rat from the cellar, scaling the wall? Raising herself cautiously, after the manner of cats, she listened.

"No: it was neither rat nor cat. Light hoofs as of goats were climbing the tiles, bells tinkled, a small sledge came in view. Swift as light it flew along, paused at the next chimney, and a little old man jumped out. His face shone in the moonlight like a jolly red apple, his fat body

was wrapped in fur, on his back was a bag. Puss had never seen him before; but she knew him well. It was St. Nicholas, the patron saint of Christmas.

"Down the chimney he went, with a motion like a bird's; up again as fast. Then advancing, he searched in his bag. His kind face looked puzzled. The Cat saw his hesitation, and sprang forward.

"'Well, Puss,' said the Saint, 'what cheer?'

"'Bad,' said the Cat, no ways abashed at finding herself in such company. 'But never mind me, if only you 've something nice for Gretchen. *Such* a dear child, St. Nicholas, and *such* a step-mother! Do put your hand in the pouch, and fetch out something pretty for her,—oh do! there 's a kind Saint!' And she rubbed her soft fur coaxingly against his legs.

"'Ah! a dear child and a step-mother, eh?' said St. Nicholas. 'Let me look again. Certainly! here 's something for Gretchen.—Who-ho, reindeer! quiet a moment!' And down the

chimney he whipped, a present in his hand,—what, the Cat couldn't see.

"Coming back, 'Now about yourself?' he asked, gathering up the reins. 'What keeps you on the cold roof all night? Something must be done, you know: matters can't be left this way. Wish a wish, if you have one. I'm in a humor for pleasing everybody while I'm about it.'

"So the Cat told her story. 'And for a wish,' she said, 'if your Saintship would only permit me to slip in under your furs, and go along, I should be proud and happy. They look very warm and comfortable. I should sleep; or, if not, it would be most interesting to watch your Worship at work. And I take very little room,' she added piteously.

"'Is that all? Why, jump in at once,' said kind St. Nicholas: 'there is room for forty cats like you. My sledge is never full. Ho! ho! it would be a pretty joke if it were!' And he laughed a jolly laugh.

"So Pussy jumped in. 'You must let me out

in the morning early,' said she, 'because Gretchen will be anxious.'

"Oh, yes!" replied the Saint, smiling queerly. 'I'll let you out in the morning. I'm like a bat, you know, and never fly except by night.'

"Off they went, the magic stillness of the flight broken only by the tinkling bells. First one chimney, then another; bag after bag full of toys and sweets; here a doll, there a diamond ring, here only a pair of warm stockings. Everybody had something, except in a few houses over whose roofs St. Nicholas paused a moment with a look half sad, half angry, and left nothing. People lived there who knew him little, and loved him less.

"Through the air, — more towns, — more villages. Now the sea was below them, the cold, moon-lit sea. Then again land came in sight, — towers and steeples, halls and hamlets; and the work began again. A wild longing to explore seized the Cat. She begged the Saint to take her down one specially wide chimney

on his shoulder. He did so. The nursery within looked strange and foreign; but the little sleeping face in bed was like Gretchen's, and Pussy felt at home. A whole bag full of presents was left here. And then, hey! presto! they were off again to countless homes,—to roofs so poor and low that only a Saint would have thought of visiting them, to stately palaces, to cellars and toll-gates and lonely attics; at last to a church, dim, and fragrant with ivy-leaves and twisted evergreen, where their errand was to feed a robin who had there found shelter, and was sleeping on the topmost bough. How his beads of eyes sparkled as the Saint awoke him! and how eagerly he pecked the store of good red berries which were *his* Christmas present, though he had hung up no stocking, and evidently expected nothing. To small, to great, to rich and poor alike, the good Saint had an errand. Little ones smiled in their sleep as he moved by, birds in hidden coverts twittered and chirped, bells faintly tinkled and chimed as in

dream, the air sent up incense of aromatic smells, flying fairies made room for the sledge to pass; the world, unconscious what it did, breathed benediction, and in turn received a blessing as it slept,—a Christmas blessing.

"Off again. More sea, tumbling and tossed; then a great steamship, down whose funnel St. Nicholas dropped a parcel or two. Then another country, with atmosphere heavy with savory scents,—of doughnuts, of pumpkin pies, of apple turnovers, all of which had been cooked the day before. These dainties stay on earth, and are eaten; but their smell goes up into the clouds, and the ghosts dine upon it. The Cat licked her lips. Flying gives appetite. 'When morning comes,' she thought, 'Gretchen will smuggle me a breakfast.' But morning was long in coming, and there were many little ones to serve in that wonderful new land.

"And now, another continent passed, another ocean came in view. Island after island rose and sank; but the sledge did not stop. Then a

shore was seen, with groves of trees, fan-shaped and curious; with rivers whose waters bore fleets of strange misshapen boats, in whose masts hung many-colored lanterns; and cities of odd build, whose spires and pinnacles were noisy with bells. But neither here did the sledge stop. Once only it dipped, and deposited a package in a modest dwelling. ‘A Missionary lives there,’ said the Saint. ‘This is China. Don’t you smell the tea?’

“On and on for hundred of leagues. No stay, no errand. St. Nicholas looked sad, for all his round face. ‘So many little children,’ he muttered, ‘and none of them mine!’ And then he cheered again, as, reining his deer upon a hut amid the frozen snows of Siberia, he left a rude toy for an exile’s child. ‘Dear little thing!’ he said, ‘she will smile in the morning when she wakes.’

“And now the air grew warm and soft. Great cities were below them, and groves of flowering trees. Some balmy fragrance wrapped the land.

A vast building swept into sight, whose sides and roof and spires were traced in glittering lines of fire. It was a church hung with lamps. Odors sweet and heavy met their noses. St. Nicholas sneezed, and shook his head impatiently. ‘Confound that incense !’ he said. ‘It’s the loveliest country in the world, only a fellow can’t breathe in it !’ And then he forgot his discomfort in his work.

“Another country, and more smells, — of burning twigs, pungent and spicy; of candles just blown out. These set the Cat to coughing; but St. Nicholas minded them not at all. ‘I like them,’ he declared: ‘I like every thing about a Christmas-tree, — singed evergreen, smoking tallow, and all. The sniff of it is like a bouquet of flowers to me. And the children, — bless them! — how they do enjoy it! *They* don’t object to the smell !’ He ended with a chuckle.

“And now the dawn began. The moon grew pale and wan; the stars hid themselves; dark

things took form and shape, and were less dark; yellow gleams crept up the sky ; the world looked more alive. And, among the roofs over which they were now driving, the Cat spied one which seemed familiar. It was ! There stood the well-known chimney, with the thin, starved curl of smoke, telling of some one awake within. There was the little window which was Gretchen's own. With a mew of delight, she leaped to the roof. The Saint laughed. 'Good-by !' he shouted, shook his reins, and was off. Whither the Cat knew not, nor could guess; for where St. Nicholas hides himself during the year is one of the secrets which no man knows.

"Down the long spout ran Puss, with an airy bound. There was the door; and close to it she stationed herself, impatient of the opening. She had not long to wait. In a moment the latch was raised, and a face peeped timidly out,—Gretchen's face,—pale and swollen with crying. When she saw the Cat, she gave a loud scream, and caught her in her arms.

"'O Katchen !' she cried, hugging her close.
'Where have you been all this time? I thought
you were dead ! I did, I did, my Katchen !'

"Pussy stared, as well she might.

"'All day yesterday,' went on the little one,
'and all night long. I cried and cried, — *how* I
cried, my Kitty ! It wasn't a bit a nice Christmas,
though the Christ-child brought me *such* a doll !
I could think of nothing but my Katchen, lost
all day long.'

"Puss stood bewildered. Were her night's
adventures a dream? Had she ever studied
geography, she might have guessed that chasing
morning round the world is a sure way to lose
your reckoning. As it was, she could only
venture on a plaintive, inquiring 'Mew?' Hun-
ger was more engrossing than curiosity. She
devoured breakfast, dinner, supper, all at once.
The Stepmother had more reason than ever when
she grumbled at being 'eaten out of house and
home by a beast.' But Gretchen's tears the day

before had so moved her Father, that he took courage to declare that Puss must be restored to her former privileges. Warm corner, dainty mess, and the protecting arms of her little mistress became hers again, and are hers to this day.

"And that was St. Nicholas's Christmas present to the Cat.

"Well," said December, rolling up the paper, "how do you like my story?"

"So much! oh, so much!" the children cried.
"It was almost the nicest of all."

"As for my present," he went on, "I am not going to give you that just now. It shall come on the Christmas-tree. And mind you look bright, and greet the Christ-child with a smile, or he will be grieved, and go away sorrowful."

"I don't believe we shall have any tree this year," said Thekla, sadly. "There isn't any thing to put on it. And beside"—but her

voice faltered. Grandfather had always helped to dress the tree.

"Oh, but," cried December, "this will never do. Why, you *must* have a tree! Never mind if there isn't any thing to put on it. The Christ-child and I will see to that. Now I'll tell you,—you just cut a nice fir-bough, and set it here against the door, and I'll pledge my word, as an honest Month, that *something* shall come from outside and fall upon it. Do you give me your promise that you will?"

They promised,—half doubtful, half believing. And then December asked for the can, and, turning it upside down, poured out the last particles of sand.

"Dear! dear!" he said reflectively, "what a blessing that these are not lost! How the babies would have cried at being forced to go to bed half an hour sooner on Christmas night! And the Anthem would have been cut short on the blessed morning too, and the bells been cheated

of their chime. It's a great mercy I have got them safely back."

"Good-by! good-by!" cried the children, following him to the door.

He stooped, and kissed both the round faces.

"Good-by!" he said. "Remember Christmas Eve."



"'O Katchen!' she said, 'where have you been?'"

CONCLUSION.

WHAT WAS ON THE TREE.

IT was with heavy hearts that Max and Thekla prepared on Christmas Eve to fulfil their promise to the kind Month. Only six days lay between them and the dreaded separation; for on the New Year the Ranger was to come, and it was hard to be hopeful and patient while such sorrow drew near. There was no laughter, no frolic, as they dragged in the great fir-bough, and set it up against the door where December had directed. When it was placed, they pulled their stools to the fire and remained for a while quite silent. Both were thinking of the kind old hands which last year had hung nuts and apples on the tree, and helped to light the Christmas candles. There were no tapers now, no filberts, or green and rosy fruits,—only

the fir-bough with its damp, fresh smell, and themselves sitting sadly beside the hearth.

"It is getting late," said Thekla, at last,



"Late into the night did they all sit over the fire, while Fritz told the story of his seven long years of absence."

throwing on a fresh fagot. "I suppose the Christ-child has a great, great deal to do."

"Or perhaps he has forgotten all about us," added Max, despondingly.

But at that moment, as if to contradict his words, a footstep sounded at the door. The latch was raised and loudly rattled. "Hallo!" cried a voice. "Where are you all? Grand-father, children,—show a light, somebody!" And then the door opened, and plump into the middle of the tree came a young man, head foremost, as if he had dropped from the clouds.

For a moment he sat there, the green boughs framing in his ruddy face and bright yellow hair. Then he picked himself up, and exclaimed, "Well, there's a welcome home! I didn't expect to be made into a Christmas Angel so soon.—Max!" (wonderingly). "Is it Max? Thekla!—can it be little Thekla? Why don't you speak? Don't you know me? Have you forgotten Fritz?"

"Fritz!" cried the little ones. "Not our Fritz who went away so long ago?"

"The very same bad shilling come again," laughed the big brother, catching Thekla in his arms and almost squeezing her to death with a hug. "But why do you look so astonished? Didn't Grandfather get my letter? And where is the Grandfather?" beginning to collect himself. But then he caught the look on Max's face, and saying "Ah!" he suddenly turned very pale, and releasing Thekla sat down in the nearest chair.

"When?" he asked at length, raising his face from the hands with which he had hidden it.

"A month ago," said Max; but Thekla, putting her arm round on the new brother's arm, added softly, in the very words of December, "Don't be so sorry, dear Fritz. He has gone where he is young again."

Late into the night did they all sit over the fire, while Fritz told the story of his seven long years of absence. It seemed to the children very exciting; for Fritz had twice been shipwrecked, had seen a buffalo, and only just escaped being killed by an Indian! He had

been very poor too, and suffered such hardships that he could not bear to write home the tidings of his ill-luck. But now things were better. Out on the Western frontier of the United States (here Max and Thekla smiled at each other and thought of "Chusey") he had found employment and kind friends, and managed to save from his wages enough to buy a little farm. He told of the oaks, the noble rivers, the plentiful food and rich soil, the splendid colors of the autumn forest.

"And it is your home as well as mine," continued Fritz. "I came back on purpose to fetch you. Oh! if Grandfather had but lived to see the day! Max shall work on the farm with me; and before he knows it he will have earned one of his own. And you, my fairy, shall keep house for us both in true German fashion; and we will all be so happy! What do you say, Liebchen? Shall it be so? Will you and Max come with me?"

Ah! wouldn't they? Here was a Christmas gift indeed,—a home, a brother! Did ever mor-

tal tree bear so fine a present before? They embraced Fritz over and over again, Thekla promising between her kisses to be *such* a house-wife,—so orderly, so busy! Sauer-kraut he should never be without, nor cabbage soup, nor any thing else that was nice. And just then something droll happened which Fritz did not see, but the children did. The door opened gently a little way, and through the crack appeared the head of December, nodding and winking above the fallen fir-bough, and beaming with smiles. He pointed to Fritz's back and then to the tree, with an "I told you so" air, noiselessly clapped his hands, and withdrew, just as Fritz shivered, and said, "Bless me, the wind has blown the door open!"

One week later a large ship weighed anchor in a port, and upon her deck stood our two children and their new brother. There was no one to see them go. All their few farewells had been spoken in the distant village and beside Grandfather's grave. But as the heavy cables swung and heaved, and the vessel, released from

bondage, moved slowly from the harbor, upon the slope of a snow-covered hill beneath which she passed, amid the nodding pines which crowned the top, a group of figures suddenly appeared. They were the twelve Months come to wave farewell to the children. There was January, disdainful as ever; sweet, rosy June; February, his honest nose reddened by the keen wind; May and April, clasping each other's waists like a pair of school-girls. When they saw Max and Thekla on the deck, a little chorus of laughter, exclamation, and "Good-bys" could be heard. Thekla caught the sound of March's wild "Ha ! ha !" the rich voice of September; April's gleeful laugh, as she flung a handful of violets at the ship, and her sob when they fell, as of course they did, into the water, and were borne out to sea. A moment,—no more. The children had time for only one glad smile of recognition, before the vision vanished and was gone. And no one else on the deck observed any thing but the sun dancing on the snow, the dark evergreens, and a few tossing leaves of

bright color which still clung to the bare boughs of an oak-tree.

"Dear, dear Months,—how good they have been to us!" whispered Thekla, as the hill faded from view.

And the ship spread her white wings, and sailed away to the New World.



"One week later a large ship weighed anchor in a port, and upon her deck stood our two children," Max and Thekla.

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